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The NOTORIOUS
MISS LISLE
MRS. BAILLIE-REYNOLDS

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THE NOTORIOUS MISS LISLE

THE NOTORIOUS MISS LISLE

BY
MRS. BAILLIE-REYNOLDS

AUTHOR OF "OUT OF THE NIGHT,"
"THE GIRL FROM NOWHERE," ETC



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A MONS. ANATOLE LEBRAZ

**DONT L'ŒUVRE EST, POUR MOI,
LA VOIX TRISTE ET CLAIRE DE SON PAYS,
LA BRETAGNE,
L'ÉCHO FIDÈLE DE SON CHARME MYSTÉRIEUX.**

HOMMAGE AFFECTUEUX ET RECONNAISSANT.

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THE NOTORIOUS MISS LISLE

THE NOTORIOUS MISS LISLE

CHAPTER I

PETER AND PORZ GWENN

—“The boat
Drave with a sudden wind across the deeps,
And touching Breton sands, they disembarked.”

TENNYSON.

WHATEVER his faults may have been, there was little to complain of in the personal appearance of Peter.

He was not more than common tall, but he was well put together. The way his head was placed upon his firm neck, above his square shoulders — the set of his flat, well-modelled ears — gave you satisfaction as you gazed. Perhaps his nose was too long, and a little too sharp. His mouth could look very hard, and his lips were too thin. But his eyes, which were of that dark grey which is not at all blue but carries a hint of purple, were doubtless prepossessing. His smile was charming, his teeth were good, his dun-coloured hair had a strong tendency to curl.

Such is the catalogue of his personal attractions. What he lacked was in the way of personal expression. His manner had that self-content — that *blankness* we might say, for want of a better word — which is, if

you track it down, the result of a life spent without duly considering the importance of important things.

Peter had indeed thought much in his time. He had carefully weighed the merits of the various Continental routes, and had decided the claims to pre-eminence of the best known cathedrals of Europe. He had a developed opinion upon the leading actors and singers of the day; though there were one or two authors whose plays he avoided, because they sailed too near that vortex of Search-after-Truth which Peter, on his pleasure cruise, avoided like a wise mariner.

He would have been deeply shocked, by the way, had you accused his life of being a pleasure cruise. He was quite serious, and moderately well informed. He was often to be seen at the lectures of the Royal Institution, and always went to Church on Sunday if there was a Church of his own cult handy: unless it rained heavily.

In spite of which he stands accused of not realizing the importance of important things. It really sounds like calumny.

He was seated, when you see him first, in what Rousselle is wont to describe as his *charrette Anglaise*. His portmanteau and Gladstone bag lay behind the board upon which he and his charioteer were seated. As they reached the top of the short incline where stands the coastguard station and the semaphore, there lay suddenly before Peter a coast scene of surprising beauty.

Everyone who knows the *Côtes du Nord* knows also that the rocks have the chameleon's own faculty for

changing colour. One has seen them look like gold, like silver, like mud, like lead, like vapour, like rose-petals. That evening, they chose to be of a dark melting chocolate mingled with purple. The tide was high, and a pale calm opal sea encircled each islet in a setting of mother o' pearl.

Peter requested Rousselle to check his horse, while he gazed with the gaze of the truly appreciative.

"St. Gildas," said Rousselle, pointing to one isle, whereon, embosomed in trees could be seen the spire of a tiny chapel. He went on to enumerate others, whereon people of importance had erected summer villas. Peter's attention wandered to the procession, slowly mounting the 'côte' behind him.

Some thin horses, weirdly speckled, a dog or two, a caravan, some women and children, a cart laden with long poles and canvas. A travelling circus. The man who led it remarked to Rousselle as he wiped his brow, that the hill was *un peu dur*. The small urchin at his side turned cartwheels in the dust for Peter's benefit, and the young man tossed him a sou. Then Rousselle's steed impulsively started off, down the hill, two kilometres long, at whose feet nestles Porz Gwenn, with its tiny harbour, protected tenderly from the rude seas by a belt of green islands.

The pace was a little startling to Peter, but he was too much a traveller to think he could instruct the native. He sat tight, and in a short time was safely landed at the door of the little Inn which is known as the *Hotel Granit Rose*.

It was with satisfaction that he entered the unpre-

tending little place, and saluted the host and hostess, who gave him such a welcome as one finds only among the unsophisticated. Peter had wished to see if there yet remained in Brittany any old-world retreat such as this; and here, at last, was what he had hoped to find.

He had spent the last six months in Spain, smoothing his dying mother's pillow. Mrs. Garstin, a handsome woman, had been twice married, Peter being the child of her second husband. During her second widowhood she had been bitten by a sudden passion for roulette. She had passed her time going from one Casino to another all along the Riviera, having at first the traditional luck of the beginner, which, however, soon deserted her. Fortunately for Peter, she had only a life interest in his father's money. Soon, her creditors took all the interest there was, and Peter was obliged to subsidize her. She retired to a remote corner of Spain, in order to live cheaply, and there developed an internal complaint, which the doctors considered serious.

Peter was summoned from his chambers in the Temple — from the London that he loved — in January. His mother lingered till July.

The young man felt truly bereaved, for his only living near relative was now his mother's daughter by her first marriage, Mildred, who had married a parson and lived in the provinces.

He had a forlorn sensation of being wholly unappropriated. One has often little in common with one's

nearest of kin, but there is a sense of support in having them to fall back upon. Mildred hardly counted. She had resented her mother's second marriage, had always thought her half-brother spoilt and, though her attitude towards the late Mr. Garstin had been consistently unfilial, had been much displeased when he 'left everything to Peter.'

Peter discovered that he was quite well off: and the dim pleasure this afforded him was the sole mitigation of his melancholy. He did not hurry home, because he disliked the feeling that he had no home to which to hurry. He embarked upon a coasting vessel, and dawdled round the coast of Spain and of Western France, landing finally in Brittany, because he had heard things of that country which led him to suppose it worthy of the attention of a truly superior person.

He was rather disgusted to find, in those places which have been made famous by the holiday output of certain novelists, that the peasants were obviously posing, and even the Pardons engineered by outsiders, with a view to their effective arrangement. Nothing was spontaneous. He saw too many picture postcards, adorned with sentimental verses about the *Fleur d'ajonc* and the *biniau*. Then he met somebody who, finding that these things were really distressing to Peter, whispered a name, as a great secret. So he was come, by devious routes, to Porz Gwenn and he felt, as la Patronne greeted him on the threshold, that he had been guided to the right place at last.

There were two long tables in the *salle-à-manger*, spread with red and white check table-cloths, and with

tall bottles of cider arranged down the middle. When the '*baigneurs*' assembled to dine, Peter noticed with much satisfaction that he was the only Englishman present. The fare was excellent, and his next neighbour, a morose journalist, who seemed to have fore-stalled his cider with something more potent, confided to him during the third course, the sad history of his somewhat tangled matrimonial relations. Peter felt all the pleasure of the true connoisseur. At last he had fallen out from the game of follow-my-leader which the English seem always to play on the Continent. He was now seeing Brittany 'on his own.'

The meal was interrupted by a clash of wild sound from without. Everybody turned in his seat, or went to the windows, whence could be descried a sight delightful to the eyes of the foreigner who wants to see the life of the place as it is. The circus had come to a halt upon the smooth sands at the foot of the hill upon whose flank the small hotel was perched. The ladies who formed the troupe were seated in the cart — now emptied of its poles and canvas — with drums and tambourines, and other noise producing instruments. They were slowly driven past the houses of the village by the lean proprietor, who, opposite the *Granit Rose*, called a halt, stood up, and in loud tones announced a performance that evening at eight hours, by the world-famed Violette troupe, to include equestrian acts, legerdemain, and the feats of trained animals, including a learned ass.

This was enchanting. Peter sat, his dinner done, out upon the small terrace which overlooked the sea;

and enjoyed his cigar and his excellent *café noir*, while the soft dusk gathered the outlines of the isles into its advancing arms as it crept over the sea from the east, threatening the still glowing fires of the sunset.

At a quarter to eight he strolled, hatless and comfortable, down the village street to the beach. Here, he got a little shock of disillusion. It seemed that there was another hotel, of a more pretentious kind than the *Granit Rose*, standing back from the little twisting row of grey-stone cottages. This was a pity. Porz Gwenn, then, was not quite the pristine wilderness which his fancy painted. He sighed as he paid his admission and went into the tent, amused by the volubility of the proprietor, who was urging the villagers towards the 'fauteuils à dix sous' which were not filling as fast as he desired.

Peter was supplied with a Programme, giving a truly glowing picture of the delights awaiting him. The performance, it seemed, was to include:

"Exercices équestres, gymnastique, acrobatie, voltige, jongleurs, équilibristes, manœuvres, scènes comiques à cheval, chiens, chèvres, ânes, cochons et singes savants, et plusieurs petits chevaux dressés en liberté."

(Les intermèdes seront remplis par les AUGUSTES de la troupe et la représentation terminée par la scène comique à pied et à cheval, du voyage de M. et Madame Angot.)

The large hotel notwithstanding, this seemed to be the real thing. The Englishman took his place in an enclosure carefully railed off from the quarters occupied by the vulgar plebs, and entered into conversation

with the fishermen nearest the dividing piece of sail-cloth, with a view to a day's sail among the isles upon the following day.

It was just at this point that he heard the sound of his own language, with feelings of the strongest distaste.

He told himself that he might have known that there would be English staying at the Grand Hotel. What a pity! Even this place ruined by tourists. It was a young man of about his own age who had spoken. He had strolled in, apparently to survey the accommodation provided and what he said was this:

"It's quite possible. You may as well come in."

A young lady obeyed the summons, stooping under the tent ropes with an air of condescending disgust. She was followed by another young man, carrying her cloak over his arm. Then came an elderly lady, with a sweet face and a rather worried expression. After her, a tallish girl of about two and twenty, and closely following the girl, the paterfamilias, his face burnt scarlet by the sun, which gave him an unnaturally inflamed aspect. His field-glasses were slung across his pepper-and-salt jacket; he carried his straw hat in his hand, and a sheaf of programmes.

Peter had taken his seat at the end of the front bench. When the English family had joined him, the bench was full, and creaked a little ominously. They all looked at him as they sat down, with the solitary exception of the girl who sat between her parents. It struck him that they looked with even more than the curiosity naturally excited by the presence of a stranger

in the village. He reflected that they were probably eager to discover if he were English, and he felt in no mood to gratify their curiosity. He continued his conversation with the fishermen; he flattered himself that he had little trace of the English accent.

The family began to move and speak with the remarkable freedom which one notices frequently among the English; as though the other members of the audience did not exist. Their comments were, however, good-humoured, and they struck Peter as being well-bred folk. He could not help wondering what brought them to such an out-of-the-way corner of the world. They were the kind of people you expect to find at Lucerne or Interlaken, in a good hotel.

As the performance went on, he found himself sending side-glances down the line of their profiles, to that of the girl who was placed between her parents. She was not like the others. When he began to wonder what the difference was, he found that it was a matter of expression. The young man next him had an appearance of rather empty good-humour. The lady at his side must be his sister, for the family likeness was strong; but the man on her left was of quite another type. He had a thin, precise face, and wore pince-nez. Peter decided after a while that these two were husband and wife, for the commonplace young lady wore a wedding-ring, and they were evidently on very familiar terms. After about ten minutes, however, he forgot his neighbours completely, in sheer amusement at the comically inadequate performance. One came to the conclusion that the Cirque Violette left the greater part

of its troupe behind when it went touring, for the vaunted items on the Programme were most of them conspicuous by their absence. There was, however, true humour in the efforts of a small *Auguste*, about eight years old, who made attempts to mount the pony upon which his little sister rode around the ring and finally, having accomplished his design with his face to the tail, applied a small thumb to his artificially scarlet nose, and winked solemnly at the audience.

To Peter, the very atrocity of the entertainment constituted its charm, but the English paterfamilias grew a little restive, though his married daughter reminded him that they had not paid highly for their seats.

Her younger sister, as Peter took her to be, did not seem to take any interest in what was going on. She sat with an immobility which was noticeable. When her father spoke to her, which he did pretty often, she replied, but without movement or change of expression. He seemed to be continually applying to her for a translation of the 'plaisanteries' with which the troupe amused the natives. Her fair hair was arranged low at the sides of her face; and there was a certain sullenness about her mouth, very unlike the elementary good-humour of the rest of the family. She wore a 'smasher' hat of green wash-leather, and a dress of the same colour. It had no collar, leaving visible the line of a white throat. Either the frock was subtly cut, or her figure was a very graceful one; for Peter found himself studying the lines of her arms and shoulders, which he could see because her mother leant back

all the time, against the bar which constituted the difference between the best seats and those next in price.

All the time that he watched her, she never once smiled. Towards the end of the performance, a certain little ass named Polichinelle was led on by the proprietor, who desired him to walk all round, and choose that member of *l'assistance* who was the wisest man in the place. This was done, among shouts of laughter, and various other tests followed. At last, the thing set the ass to determine was which lady would first be married. The little donkey went round, gently sniffing. Hitherto he had stopped before one of the villagers, evidently pointed out previously by some accomplice to the man, as fulfilling the conditions. This time he went to the ten-sous places, and, to the astonishment and amusement of everybody stopped determinedly before the English girl in the green hat. It was a harmless joke, and no doubt the poor man thought it would gratify the gentlefolk. But the girl's demeanour was curious. She rose in her place, and with an expression of mingled anger and mortification, tried to pass her father and leave the circus. Her parents, like police, caught her one at each side, and induced her, by what arguments cannot be known, to resume her seat. Peter noticed that the other members of the party were deeply absorbed in watching the issue. The girl subsided, like one too downtrodden to persist in rebellion. But her sullen look had deepened to one positive misery. It haunted Peter, long after he had gone to bed, under a sky of star-spangled beauty, with his window wide open to the night hymn of the sea.

CHAPTER II

THE COMING OF THE ENGLISH

Life holds not an hour that is better to live in; the past is a tale
that is told,
The future a sun-flecked shadow, alive and asleep, with a blessing
in store.
As we give us again to the waters, the rapture of limbs that the
waters enfold
Is less than the rapture of spirit.

SWINBURNE.

NEXT morning, the 'whole world was blue and golden,
with touches of emerald and amethyst here and there.

One could hardly perceive the *Sept Iles* for the haze
which brooded over the scarcely rippling sea. Peter,
leaning from the dormer window of his quaint room,
drank in the beauty of it all with a sense of vast content.

He had been very tired the night before — so much
so that he awoke too late to bathe before his *petit
déjeuner*. He mentally arranged his programme for
the day with that methodical completeness which was
very much a part of him. He would lie for an hour or
two after his coffee and drink in beauty and gladness,
then bathe, then *déjeuner*, then go sailing until the
evening. The tide was low. It would come in by de-
grees, and there would be plenty of water to carry him
among the isles in the afternoon.

Porz Gwenn has two beaches, divided by the rock they call *La Sentinelle*, whence the shrine of Our Lady of Porz Gwenn overlooks the ocean and the peril of her sons. The beach which lies before the Grand Hotel is the fashionable one, and therefore to be shunned. The thin, brown children and their *bonnes* sit there. The smaller bay belongs as it were by consent, to the Hotel Granit Rose and that morning, Peter thought it perfection.

When he had watched the limpid water curl far enough over the sand to give him depth enough, he laid aside his nice neat clothes, in the privacy of his nook between tall boulders and, attired in an appropriate bathing suit, stood up to take his header.

As he did so, he saw that, hidden from his view by the intervening rocks, the English family who had sat beside him last night, had, most unjustifiably, invaded the little bay. The two parents were seated upon camp stools, with novels and umbrellas, in their comfortable British manner; and just arriving from the village street above, were the four younger members of the party, disguised in bathing cloaks. Peter felt quite unreasonably annoyed. They might let him alone. What did they want, violating the solitude of his own private bay?

The silent girl who had worn the odd green hat, now threw off her long scarlet cloak, letting it fall beside her mother. She slipped out of her canvas shoes, and stood up tall and slim in a white bathing suit, trimmed with dark blue. She walked over to the rocks on the opposite side of the bay to where Peter stood, sprang up

with surprising agility, chose her position with the air of one doing what she did habitually, and took as graceful and successful a header as Peter had ever seen, followed by her brother, in scarlet and white stripes.

The onlooker felt inclined to forgive much for the sake of that header. There was something about it so natural, so easy, so healthful. It gave the impression of youth and perfectly tempered bodily conditions. His own splash into the water followed swiftly upon hers and as he came up, and swam lazily off across the bay, he noticed with amusement that the rage of his two compatriots at his own presence was quite as great as his had been at theirs.

The married sister and her husband walked into the water with a suitable gravity and this lady was not wholly free from the desire to express her total freedom from cold and fear by small squeals and splashings. Her husband was instructing her in the art of swimming, and she did not make an apt pupil.

All this did not escape the observant Peter, who was, in his own estimation, a student of human nature. He swam at a respectful distance, enjoying his morning almost as though the intruders were not there. The way in which the girl and her brother tried experiments together, diving, swimming on their backs, and so on, made him feel extra lonely. It occurred to him that he might do worse than condescend to become acquainted with these people.

He strolled back to his admirable *déjeuner* in meditative mood. Afterwards he went down to the tiny port, where, against a short stone jetty, the *Reine Anne*

rocked upon translucent waters, and Daniel, huge and dignified, like a majestic walrus, with a long bleached moustache, waited his coming.

A very small breeze was whispering and playing among the isles — so small that it only just sufficed to send them gliding in and out among the reefs and shoals. But Peter did not want to cover distance; he just desired to smoke and laze, and feast his eyes upon a slow panorama of queer, desolate beauty.

Daniel told him legends, and showed him landmarks. All the legends had for their theme the cruelty and rapacity of the English. They landed, burnt, robbed and murdered; but there was an occasion upon which Our Lady of Porz Gwenn took a hand, and gave them a lesson. One day, when, owing probably to the *Pêche de la morue*, there were only five men in the garrison, the English were sighted, just outside the Port. Then Our Lady turned the fern—the bracken which still grows so plentifully in the yard of her Chapel — into soldiers; and the rapacious English were driven back.

Peter was quite a good person to whom to tell a legend. He did not, as do nine out of every ten to whom Daniel tells his story, enquire what afterwards became of the bracken soldiers. He just accepted the gift as offered, and enjoyed it.

He hardly knew how the afternoon slipped away. It was past five when they determined to go outside the harbour, and look at the ruined fortifications of the isles from the seaward side.

To do this, they bent their course past St. Gildas and as they went, Peter became aware that somebody,

standing upon the shore of the island, was making signals to them. He spoke to Daniel.

"There is somebody there, on the island where the chapel is, trying to attract our attention."

Daniel looked. "*Baigneurs*," he opined with some scorn. "They have landed, and the proprietor does not allow it. More fools they."

"But why do they not re-embark and return, if that is the case?" asked Peter.

Daniel laughed. "I expect their boat has sailed away," he replied.

"Sailed away? But would the boatman not warn them that they must not land there?" asked Peter surprised.

Daniel shrugged his great shoulders. "They might have got permission. What did the sailor know?"

"I expect they want us to take them off," said Peter.

"They are too many," answered Daniel placidly, "but we could take a message to their man to come and fetch them."

They steered their course for the Isle, accordingly, and Peter was hardly astonished to find that it was the English party who stood very much annoyed and heated upon the shore, stranded in hostile country, while a Breton peasant in a blue smock, stood threateningly at the landward extremity of the beach, to prevent their leaving the stones.

As he drew near, Peter could not help feeling amused to see that the party had brought preparations for tea upon a generous scale. The mother sat upon her camp stool, and her married daughter upon the hamper near.

The father spoke angrily to the two young men, as if scolding them. The girl in green was stooping for shells among the pebbles on the margin of the water.

As the boat drew near, the father, having his attention directed to it by his son, advanced, and called out stammeringly —

“Pardong, mossoo, mais pouvez-vous nous prendre avec vous, parceque nous — er — il faut — er —”

“Do you want to get back to shore?” asked Peter, standing up.

“There!” said the mother triumphantly, “didn’t I say he was English? I felt sure of it.”

The three Englishmen hereupon advanced, much more cordially, and the difficulty was soon explained. They could not understand that mere French people could be so exclusive as to wish to prevent English people from landing on their island.

“It ought not to be allowed, I think,” said the mother plaintively, “for the Guide-book says it is quite one of the show places of the district, and really there is so very little to see, within a reasonable distance. There is the statue of a saint, that the poor misguided peasants think can heal cattle disease, and they bring the cows and horses across at low tide, to rub their noses against the statue! And then to go and say we may not even look at it! I call it too bad.”

“I’m afraid in my heart of hearts, I sympathize with the owners,” Peter admitted, with his superior little smile. “I fear I should do it myself, you know. But I understand your annoyance. The men should have explained to you that such was the state of things.”

"Well, you know," said the son, "I am inclined to think they did, only we did not tumble to what they said, exactly. It must be jolly being able to rattle off the lingo as you do."

"Oh, I can't speak Breton," said Peter. "Most of these fellows talk French, right enough."

The young man grew rather red. "French is lingo to me," he replied a little defiantly.

"Meanwhile," said the mother, "perhaps this gentleman could be so kind as to take us off in his boat."

"Well, if this island is St. Gildas, I think I can do better than that," replied Peter, pulling out his pocket-book. "I met a charming man in the south last week, an artist, and he gave me a letter to the lady here, asking her to let me land. If you care about it, I shall be delighted to walk up and present it, and see what kind of reception I get."

There was a chorus of surprise and thanks.

"You see, it is just as I always maintain," said the lady; "it is all very well to say one can get on quite well in France without knowing the language, but just see what a difference it means when you really know it! Why, I did not enjoy the circus last night, one bit, because I could not understand what they said."

Peter, accompanied by the youngest of the three men, strolled off up the beach. The farm labourer above met them with a glint of battle in his eye, but Peter's greeting mollified him, and Peter's production of a note, and mention of a well-known name, brought a smile to his sullen face. He conducted them through the dirty yard, to the door of an old stone farmhouse, whence

issued the elderly lady who spent the summer upon the Isle, and who greeted Peter graciously and gave permission for him and his party to roam at will. Prompted by his companion, Peter further begged to know whether they might ask the woman at the farm cottage to sell them some milk, and this also was readily granted.

"Here is a dilemma," said Mr. Garstin, smiling, as he rejoined the waiting tourists. "I have permission, freely enough, but as you are my party, I fear I must remain on the island in charge of you; and you may think that leave to picnic is dearly purchased at such a price."

"My dear sir," said the father eagerly, "I need hardly say we shall be honoured — let us present ourselves to you — our name is Lisle. My wife, my daughter, Mrs. Rusper — my son-in-law, Dr. Rusper; my son, Mr. Ronald Lisle — my younger daughter, Miss Lisle."

Peter bowed, as each member of the family was indicated, all round. He had a disappointing notion of their being ill-assured, or nervous, during the presentation, almost as though they were less well-bred people than he had expected to find them. But the impression was momentary and was gone almost before it had begun, swallowed up in the shock he received when the younger daughter, Miss Lisle, raised her eyes and acknowledged his salutation.

They were curious eyes, unlike any he had ever seen before. Their extreme lightness of colour struck him first. The outer ring of the iris was grey, but the main

colour of the eye was golden. The lashes were, or seemed to him, unusually black for so fair a skin and hair. But it was not the colour of the eyes which was so arresting. It was the expression. He was smitten with the conviction that the girl was not at all the kind of girl he thought she was and he tried hard to analyse why he thought so. What had he expected? What did he find? He could answer neither question, yet the effect of surprise dwelt with him. There was a challenge in her look which was not the challenge of sex — of youth to youth. It was rather — “Well, now you know who I am! What do I care if you do?”

Peter Garstin was oddly perturbed.

Miss Lisle did not say a word, and he was determined to make her speak. “I saw you last night, at the wonderful circus,” he said, with the smile which showed his nice teeth.

“Oh! Were you there?” said Miss Lisle indifferently.

Her voice, too, was different from his expectation. Again he tormented himself with that futile wonder as to what he had expected, and why. There was something sophisticated about the voice, or accent, or manner; something which gave him the very unusual sensation of being quite a young man, and rather elementary. The odious word ‘*cachet*’ floated about in his mind as a description of her mien. No other member of her family had any suggestion of it. The careless arrogance, so habitual as to seem like mere indifference, which he noted in her, arises from one of two causes — either very exalted rank or an extensive

knowledge of the world. Looking at the younger Miss Lisle and her family, Peter found it hard to connect either idea with her.

"I hope it amused you — the circus, I mean?" he went on, determined not to be influenced by such a floating gossamer of fanciful thought.

"I can't say it did," replied the girl.

"Indeed? I'm sorry for that," returned Peter.

She had been turning away, but paused on this.

"Sorry? Why?"

"It is a great pity not to be capable of appreciating the atrocious," declared he gravely.

She looked at him with a shade less boredom. "I didn't think it was quite atrocious enough," she replied.

"All criticism is comparison, I suppose," suggested Peter interrogatively.

"I don't think I have a fixed standard for travelling circuses," she said, and then she really had to laugh, at her own solemn absurdity.

"If you had been, as I have, travelling the show parts of Brittany," he told her, "you would have been quite enraptured, last night. Those folks were neither trying to be better nor worse than usual. They were just as they would have been, if you and I — the true audience — had not been there. That was the charm, to me."

She tossed a flat pebble upon the water, making it skim. "Well, there is charm in that, I own," she said.

"If you'll excuse me, I'll tell Daniel to come and take me off presently," he broke off. Going up to Mrs.

Lisle, he courteously enquired how long she thought she could put up with his company; then, having given his directions, turned about to resume his conversation; and was anything but flattered to find that Miss Lisle had taken advantage of the moment, to move out of earshot.

The cordiality of the rest of the family was, however, great enough to atone for this.

They told him how grateful they were to find an Englishman at such a retired place. They themselves were the only English at the Grand Hotel. They had decided, said Mrs. Lisle, that they would try what a really secluded place was like. "But I think," she confessed with a sigh, "that they are overrated."

Then they began to think of making a camp, and setting off to explore the island before tea. There is a little cliff, fronting you as you land, which is not difficult for a surefooted person to ascend. Miss Lisle was at the top sooner than Peter could have thought possible.

"I need not ask you if you like this wild kind of place," he said, as he gave her his hand up the last step, "you are evidently a born desert-islander."

"I don't know what you mean by that," she replied. "But I don't mind telling you that I hate this hole, and all its kind. My ideal place is Paris, or Monte Carlo."

"Indeed!" said Peter, and for a moment he was inclined to be huffy. Then he remembered his own sense of surprise when first he saw her face to face.

He began to think that she was older than she looked, and that she was quite worldly.

And yet in his mind there dwelt the vision of her standing with gleaming white arms aloft, springing like an arrow for the blue water, gambolling in it like the true child of nature.

He looked searchingly at her. Her skin had that perfect smoothness which only youth can show. Her eyes were clear, her limbs supple, her movements free.

She was a contradiction, a mystery, a challenge. She was somehow provocative in a way which was new to him. How could she be sister to the prosaic Mrs. Rusper, to the jolly Ronald,— how daughter to those parents?

It was as though he had been asked a riddle; and just for the time, nothing seemed of so much importance as to find the answer.

CHAPTER III

“SIX MONTHS IN SPAIN!”

“O delight of the headlands and beaches!
O desire of the wind on the wold,
More glad than a man’s when it reaches
That end which it sought from of old.”

SWINBURNE.

BEFORE they separated, the Lisles invited Peter to dine with them the following evening at the Grand Hotel. It was an invitation which, in the ordinary run, he would have declined without hesitation. But he found himself accepting, and on his way home had to own to himself that he had done so on account of Miss Lisle.

This was the more surprising, because her manner to himself was more directly discouraging than that of any other girl he ever remembered meeting. Trying to sum up her attitude, he decided that it amounted to this — “This place bores me, my own life just now bores me intensely. My people bore me. They have picked up a man to talk to. If he amuses them, very well: but I need not be bothered with him.”

He could not help saying to himself — “If she knew the sort of man I am, she would not be bored with me.” And he went to sleep trying to plan some unobtrusive device by which a knowledge of the sort of man he was might be brought to this arrogant young person.

Falling asleep, he dreamed of her. It was one of those quite indescribable dreams, in which one seems to pass into the regions of the fourth dimension, and to have experiences and emotions which the waking mind cannot translate into words. The impression left upon him was that of close companionship and acute suffering. There was a point in debate, and until it was decided, he could not reach her. How he longed for the happening of — what? He could not say. In sleep he had known acutely, but waking there was nothing that could be formulated; only the sense of something sharp, almost unbearable between him and her was confusingly strong. He was ashamed of his dream — it seemed contrary to that judicious moderation which he cherished. When he saw her walking over the sands in her bathing-costume he felt quite self-conscious, as though in sleep he had taken an undue liberty and she must be aware of it.

That morning she was in gayer mood, or perhaps the water gave her such joy that she could not be ill-tempered. There are shallows the whole way out to St. Gildas, and in consequence the sun warms the water in the little bay to a temperature which is the realization of all one's dreams. The light, the warmth, the colour, the luscious, caressing feel of wavelets and velvet sand, combined to weave a charm which one so appreciative as Peter could not but acknowledge. After he was dressed, he lay upon the shore, collarless, hatless, utterly content, in the delicious lassitude that follows a long swim.

The empty chatter of Mrs. Lisle had no power to

vex him, though he was all the time telling himself that, were it not for his curiosity respecting the daughter, he should avoid these people with great care.

"And what is your part of the world, when you are at home?" asked Mr. Lisle suddenly, laying down his paper (English).

"I live in London," said Peter, "but for the last six months I have been in Spain."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Lisle, and a rapid glance passed between him and his wife, unseen by Peter, who was lying 'on the front of his back,' as a delicately-minded lady once expressed it.

"And what were you doing in Spain?" went on the questioner.

Peter laughed. "Place where a man goes if he's embezzled funds, isn't it?" he said. "Well, that was not my case. My mother was living there, about twenty miles from Biarritz. She was taken ill and as I'm the only son, and there was nobody else to look after her, I had to go out, and stay there till it was all over. I was out six months."

"Dear me! Then your father is dead, too?" said Mrs. Lisle pityingly. But there was a keen interest behind the pity.

"Yes, some years ago. I have nobody left but my half sister, Mrs. Palmer, my mother's daughter by a former marriage."

"And does Mrs. Palmer live in London, too?"

"Oh, no. She is married to a parson, and his living is Ashwood, near Huntingdon. Do you know Huntingdon?"

"Not at all, it is quite out of our beat," was the answer, spoken with real pleasure, as though Mrs. Lisle's ignorance of Huntingdon gave her satisfaction.

Peter thought it was his turn to ask a question now.

"Which is your county?" he enquired carelessly. He did not really want to know. But he remarked an odd hesitation over the reply, which when it came was commonplace enough. "We are in London just now."

"You can't always have been, I'm sure," remarked Peter. "Miss Lisle is too athletic for a London girl."

"Too athletic?" said Mr. Lisle stiffly. He seemed hurt.

Peter rolled over. "I mean," he said, "she seems like one who has always been in touch with nature. Nothing of the cockney about her."

"O, no, nothing of the cockney, certainly," said Mrs. Lisle, as if relieved. "We have travelled a good deal."

"But not in the wilds," suggested Peter smiling.

"No, this is a new idea," broke in the father. "It was my daughter's and I fancy she regrets it already."

"She told me she did not like Porz Gwenn. I am surprised, for to me it seems almost ideal."

"Almost! That is what I say," replied Mrs. Lisle plaintively. "If there were just golf links, and a Casino, as they have almost everywhere in these French places now —"

Peter made a face. "We mean opposite things," he said. "My idea of improving the place would be — pardon me! — to pull down the Grand Hotel."

Mrs. Lisle's face was comic. "But one could not

stay — I mean *ladies* could not stay at that little inn," she objected. "Why, the only way to the best bedroom, is *through the bar!* That's impossible, you know."

"Is it?" said Peter. "I didn't know. I'm very inexperienced."

"Mr. Garstin's object in pulling down the Grand would be exactly that — to keep tourists from coming to stay here, don't you see?" her husband told her, grumpily amused.

"My incivility is unpardonable," owned Peter. "But it is my nasty British 'side.' I always wish to be the only tourist, wherever I go; excepting of course, for such a pleasant acquaintanceship as ours." He smiled so nicely that Mrs. Lisle forgave him. And he told himself he was a cad to say such things to one who could not appreciate irony.

The appearance of Madame Tissot at the door of the Hotel Granit Rose, ringing a huge bell, summoned him to *déjeuner*, and he went off, smiling apologetically. When he was gone, Mrs. Lisle turned to her husband and looked earnestly at him.

"Six months in Spain!" she said. "That accounts for it."

He stared at the sea. "Yes, I suppose so. Now, if only he were to take a fancy to Gae! But these things don't happen, except in story books."

"Far stranger things happen, really, than any I ever read of," replied the lady. "He seems to me a bit struck, anyway. Let us see what comes of it."

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Peter had some doubts that evening concerning the attire in which he should keep his dinner engagement. But ultimately he dressed, with a lounge jacket, thinking it well, on a first invitation, to err on the side of forms and ceremonies. He was relieved to find Ronald Lisle awaiting him in the road just outside the hotel, in the like costume.

"There's a further shock for you," he said with a twinkling eye. "Another compatriot turned up."

"Ah, well, these trials discipline character," sighed Peter, with an answering twinkle.

"A lady cyclist, travelling alone," Ronald informed him. "The true essence of Britannia's daughters; such a waist, such a complexion! The mater has already ascertained that she is a typewriting clerk and comes from Sheffield, so takes no further interest in her. But she's rather sport, I think."

"All these people are legitimate objects of study," said Peter resignedly, as he followed the young man within.

Mrs. Lisle's manner, as she greeted him, was a little flustered, he thought. The landlord had good-humouredly arranged that the whole English party should sit together and Mrs. Lisle did not approve of the arrangement, and said so in such audible tones that Peter thought the cycling lady could hardly help hearing her. The new-comer was a square-built, dowdy girl, with a weather-beaten face and a pleasant expression. Dr. Rusper was talking to her with the relief of one who for many days, has had nobody but his own wife and her family with whom to exchange ideas. Both

Mr. and Mrs. Lisle seemed to disapprove of the fact that he spoke to her at all. This surprised Peter, to whom they did not seem like extremely exclusive people.

Miss Lisle was not present when they went in to dinner. She came in slowly, while the soup was being served, and took the seat left vacant for her next Peter.

She wore a dress expressive of herself, as usual. It was not low, but was cut square so as to show the whole of her throat, and was of a silky material, in colour a faint dullish blue, finished with pearl embroidery. She did not look at the cycling lady, but Peter noticed that the observant eyes of the stranger, Miss Dallas, were keenly fastened upon her. Miss Lisle wore her dullest, most sullen expression. She seemed scarcely aware of where she was, or what she was doing. She was unusually pale, and looked altogether a different creature from her who had gambolled in the sparkling sea that morning.

It may sound ridiculous, but it is a fact, that Peter was still so obsessed by the memory of his presumptuous dream that for several minutes he was too confused to speak. He coloured quite guiltily.

But waiting for Miss Lisle to begin conversation was like waiting for the millennium, and after a time he grew tired of eating in silence. Mrs. Rusper was on his other side, and talked to Ronald without intermission.

He would make one more effort to reach the strange girl behind the barriers. "She shall notice me, if only to dislike me," was the underlying motive of his attack.

"Do you know, I am quite piqued," he said, "by your refusal to like Porz Gwenn. I am not at all surprised that your mother does not like it, but I should have thought you would."

This speech certainly had the effect of bringing her to attention. He could see, "What can it matter to you whether I like it or not?" trembling on her tongue. But she only said:

"Why?"

"Because it is unconventional," said Peter, and to his astonishment, a hot blush dyed the girl's face, and she looked at him almost as if in fear.

"You think I am unconventional?" she said hurriedly, under her breath.

"Perhaps I ought to say, I hope you are. I don't quite know why. I suppose a lady *may* swim as well as you do, and yet be conventional: but somehow I feel sure you are not of the Philistines."

She looked slowly round her family, from one to another, as her flush faded. "We are all Philistines," she said slowly; "all my people, I mean."

To agree to this would hardly be civil, so Peter shelved the point. "What I was going to say is, that I don't think you yet know the resources of Porz Gwenn. Have you been to the Ile de l'Abbaye yet?"

"No."

"Or to Tréguier Cathedral?"

"No."

"Or to the ruins of Tonquédec?"

"No."

"Will you promise to reserve your opinion of this

'hole' as I believe you insultingly called it yesterday, until you have been to all those places? "

"But," said she, as if unwillingly amused, "you cannot have been yet, if you only arrived yesterday."

"No. But Monsieur Tissot enlarged to me for an hour or two this afternoon upon the beauties of the place, and he was born and bred here. I am going to visit them all, and I want you and your brother to come with me. Just try it. You are bored as it is, so if our excursions bore you, you will be no worse off."

She considered him for a moment or two. This was good. The whole object of his campaign was to constrain her to consider him.

"You see," she said, "I have been ill. My nerves broke down. And I can't get back my — pleasure in things."

As she spoke, her voice wavered, and he felt sure that a tear swam just within her lower lid.

"But — but," he said, too astonished to be polite, "but I have seen you swim —"

"Oh, yes. I am quite strong again, as far as health goes."

"I see. And you would not find a long expedition too tiring? "

"Not too tiring to my limbs," she said, with a smile that took out the sting of her words. "But I expect I should get very cross. I have lost patience with life, and people seem so tiresome."

"Well," said Peter, "if people in general seem tiresome, I shall not be thin-skinned, and believe that it is

only I that bore you. I feel inclined to persist, and I promise you that if you are cross, I will bear it meekly."

She could not help laughing a little. "You are so angelic that you make one suspicious," she observed.

"I am not angelic, I am thoroughly selfish. I have a silly kind of desire to make people conform to the notion I form of them in my mind. I formed a notion about you that you ought to revel in this place and in these quaint people, as I do. And I mean to try and make that come true."

In his mind he was saying to himself, "This girl has been disappointed in some love affair, and her idiotic family have brought her to the very place to make her feel it most. All this natural beauty must be more than she can bear. I understand it all."

"Well," said Miss Lisle, "suppose I agree to try one dose of the prescription. Where shall we begin?"

"It depends upon who goes with us. If your parents wish to be of the party, we will go to Tréguier Cathedral, or to Tonquédec Castle. If only we young folk go, we will go to the Ile de l'Abbaye, and you must be prepared to *déchausser* yourself and wade."

"Oh, I should like that best," said Miss Lisle quickly.

"There!" cried Peter mischievously, "what did I tell you?"

She looked taken unawares.

"Oh, of course I like rampaging," she said, as one apologizing. "Everybody who is young and perfectly well does like it. It always seems to me so silly to write books about the heroism of those who lead the

simple life. I think the heroism consists in not leading it. Is anything more easy than to go *déchaussé* and leave off wearing hats and gloves and doing your hair, and having meals? Why, it's as easy as falling off a roof, and as fatal."

"As fatal?"

"Yes," she replied, with deliberation. "It is the snare of the devil. Those little ceremonies, like hair-brushing and dressing for dinner, and wearing clothes that must not be torn, are ways of keeping foolish people straight. They are barriers built up between us and barbarism. It does not take many weeks to destroy the safeguards it has taken so many centuries to build up, and then what is left?—"

"A book of verses, underneath the bough?" suggested Peter.

"Very seldom. If there is a book at all, it is the kind of book the circulating libraries decline to stock," said the strange girl with a slow, creeping bitterness. "Every day that you grow less civilized, you grow more animal. If I were wrecked on a desert island, and wanted to keep the company decent, and prevent their deteriorating, I would start by insisting upon their dressing for dinner every night, even if we had to make our evening gowns of cocoa-nut matting."

"Bravo!" said Peter delighted.

"The call of the Wild is the call of the Brute," pursued Miss Lisle, turning her eyes upon him blankly, as though she did not see him, but only felt the relief of expression; "it sounds in our ears, all of us who are healthy and young, and it is to be

resisted, not yielded to." She paused, and the expression of her eyes changed, as she became aware of the expression in his. "I beg your pardon," she said in a very low voice, "but I—have been a good deal mixed up with people who had all that jargon about nature at their finger ends, and—fingers get burnt sometimes, you know. I can't say this kind of thing to my people, they wouldn't understand."

"Quite so," said Peter, with grave interest, not at all over eager. His heart was beating extraordinarily fast. "The idea is, I suppose, that the civilized, educated man and woman ought to have nature for a servant, instead of a master. You and I should aim at being able to use natural freedom and natural pleasure at our will, without ever dreaming of surrendering our will to it."

"I suppose that is the key of it all," she replied draggingly, as though she were considering his point from all sides; he found this peculiarly flattering. "You and I, for instance," he was beginning, when Ronald struck in from his seat opposite.

"Garstin is the man, knows the country, speaks the language like a native. Garstin, Miss Dallas has only four days to bestow upon Porz Gwenn; didn't mean to give that, but finds it unexpectedly attractive. What ought she to do, where ought she to go first?"

They launched into plans and routes.

CHAPTER IV

HER CHRISTIAN NAME

"I am in love, you declare. I think not so; yet I grant you
It is a pleasure indeed to converse with this girl."

A. H. CLOUGH.

AFTER the evening when he dined with the Lisles, Peter expected to find the difficulties more or less cleared from his path. He felt that the gate was opened, and that he might walk in, and begin to cultivate his acquaintance with Miss Lisle.

The following day showed him that he was in error. It was arranged that they should drive to the station, take train to Tréguier, and visit the Cathedral. This plan was duly carried out; the day was fine, and the expedition successful. But the one member of the party to whom Peter would have cared to talk, was, in some mysterious way, never at his disposal. Her expansiveness of the previous evening would seem to have frightened her.

This was evidently not Mrs. Lisle's wish. She did her best to bring them together. It was done unobtrusively, and there was nothing to object to; but it annoyed Peter. After one or two rebuffs, he drew off, and left the young lady to herself.

He felt indignant, on her account, that her parents

should be so obtuse. If, as he supposed, she was recovering from an unlucky love affair, surely they should know that the most exasperating thing they could do, was to push another man under her nose.

Only a mile or two from Tréguier lies Minihiy, the small, almost deserted village which is, once a year, the goal of pilgrimage, because it was the birthplace of the great St. Yves — Yves le Vêridique — patron saint of Brittany.

Here is a tiny wayside “Débit de Boisson,” where they make excellent coffee. Peter knew that it would interest the Lisles to see this place, which was a true Breton interior, with beds all round the wall of the living-room, fronted by sliding panels of perforated wood. As the inhabitants have naturally no English, the party could not have dared to affront such an enterprise without their guide.

When the young man had given his orders — the others having gone down the road to look at a view which he had seen before — he sat down awhile by the hearth, picking up a fat, dirty, contented baby, and enquiring its age, much to the satisfaction of its proud mother, a young girl in a spotless *coiffe*, in whose eyes had dawned already the patient look of her who awaits always the return of a husband from the *pêche de la morue*.

When he had learned that the little one had only eleven months and could walk alone, and when he had remarked with fervour — “Pensez ça!” the young mother, quite melted, drew his attention to a very old woman with a wonderful smile, seated on a low seat with

her worn hands folded in her lap, and her begging basket at her side.

"That is Marie-Cynthe," she whispered. "She is blind. She finds her way anywhere. She is a great singer of the *gwerze* (Breton folk songs). I suppose you could not understand them, but if you like, presently, she could sing you the tale of the '*Brave Marin*.' She sings that in French."

No doubt there was something in Mrs. Lisle's plaint, that you cannot enjoy a country if you do not speak the tongue. Such an experience as this is outside the compass of the ordinary tourist.

Perhaps of all the party, Miss Dallas was the most appreciative. When they had finished their coffee and their substantial *tartines*, and the young wife had ceased to exclaim over the eccentricity of those who drank coffee without cognac, the old woman folded her hands and, still with the patient smile upon her wonderful face, sang them this exquisite version of the '*Enoch Arden*' story.

Brave marin revient de guerre
 Tout doux!
 Tout mal chaussé, tout mal vêtu,—
 Brave marin d'ou t'en viens-tu?
 Tout doux!

Madame, je reviens de guerre,
 Tout doux!
 Apportez vite du vin blanc
 Que le marin boive en passant,
 Tout doux!

Brave marin se mit à boire,
 Tout doux!

Se mit à boire et à chanter
La belle hôtesse soupirait,
Tout doux!

Qu'avez-vous donc, la belle hôtesse?
Tout doux!
Regrettez-vous votre vin blanc
Que le marin boit en passant?
Tout doux!

Ce n'est pas mon vin que je regrette.
Tout doux!
Mais c'est la mort de mon mari
Monsieur, vous ressemblez à lui!
Tout doux!

Mais dites-moi, la belle hôtesse
Tout doux!
Vous aviez de lui trois enfants
Et j'en vois quatre-z-à présent
Tout doux!

J'ai tant reçu de fausses lettres,
Tout doux!
Qu'il était mort, et enterré
Que je me suis remariée
Tout doux!

Brave marin vide son verre
Tout doux!
Sans remercier, tout en pleurant
S'en retourne à son régiment—
Tout doux!

Peter's eyes eagerly sought Miss Lisle's face, to see whether or no the delicate pathos, the restraint, the simplicity of this tragic little poem moved her. She neither moved nor spoke, but something in her still face encouraged him to lean forward, and say in a low voice:

"Is not that a cut above Tennyson?"

She assented emphatically. "I sometimes feel," said she, "as if nothing else that Tennyson ever wrote, could make me forgive him for the three last lines of 'Enoch Arden.'"

Peter nodded silently. He could not say more, for Marie-Cynthe was wistfully anxious to know whether she had pleased her audience. She spoke volubly, but with one French word to every ten in the Breton tongue. The young wife translated. Marie-Cynthe wished them to know that she was the most fortunate of women. The Curé made her an allowance of five sous a day. What more could a woman wish for, especially when she had such good neighbours? She held up her begging basket, with a cabbage, a few carrots, and two pears in it.

As Peter turned from bestowing upon her an acknowledgment of her kindness in singing for them, he noted that Miss Lisle's eyes were wet.

Marie-Cynthe was very anxious to sing them a Breton song about a cruel English pirate who carried a Breton maid away from all her family and friends. But Mrs. Lisle began to look bored, and Peter feared that they might miss the train, so after they had peered into the closed beds, and shuddered at the idea of sleeping in such places, they said good-bye, and left the primitive place.

On the journey home, he had no doubt that Miss Lisle was trying to keep out of his way.

This was the first of several such expeditions. It was not in Peter to be churlish, but he would greatly

have preferred his own company. There was, however, no doubt of his being indispensable to the English tourists, and he found it impossible to shake them off without definite rudeness. Miss Dallas was, after protest, added to their circle in the curious fashion in which English abroad will often accept a compatriot — a gregariousness which takes little account of personal liking.

For several days Peter acted as courier, mapping out routes, looking out trains, bargaining with natives, and getting up the history of the spots they visited. One may have too much of this kind of thing, and he began to grow what Ronald called 'fairly fed up with it.'

On one occasion, when they were climbing about the magnificent ruins of Tonquédec, Miss Dallas, who, with him, was a good deal in advance of the others in the ascent of the tower stair, turned abruptly to him as they sat upon the battlements, dangling their feet, and asked —

"Do you know Miss Lisle's Christian name?"

"No," said Peter, astonished. "I don't think I ever heard any of her party address her by name."

"That's just it. Neither have I. Bit odd, don't you think?"

"I can't say that it has so struck me."

"No? Well, I expect it is just chance; only I know Ronald's name well enough, and that Mrs. Rusper is called Cissie, and her husband Fred; but the girl's name I have never caught. Do you know whether they spell their surname Lyle or Lisle?"

"I have no idea. I never saw it written."

"Well, Lisle is not such a very uncommon name, I suppose," said the lady musingly.

Peter was puzzled, and looked at her interrogatively.

"I was thinking, you know," she said, "that they might be — I mean, I took them for another family of the same name. But this is Mr. Lisle, is it not? And that was Major Lisle, the other one I am thinking of. You never heard that Mr. Lisle was in the army, did you?"

"Oh, no. I never heard him speak of it that I remember," replied Peter mystified. He would have pursued the subject, but at the moment the rest of the party reached the top of the perilous stair, and debouched upon the roof, so the talk ceased. He found no chance to renew it; but during the rest of that day he kept his ears open for the sound of Miss Lisle's name.

There was an occasion when she had gone away and left her coat upon a stone near where her mother was sitting. Mrs. Lisle wishing to draw her attention to it, called — "My dear!"

The girl, not aware that this was addressed to her, did not turn from her contemplation of the valley through the arch of the great refectory window. Peter, though he heard, made as though he did not, in order to hear more. Mrs. Lisle, in a more distinct voice, said — "Nora!" and then again, as no response was made, "Nora!"

Still the girl did not hear, or did not heed, though she

was standing so near that Peter did not see how she could help hearing. Ronald was passing at the moment, and he said sharply —

“Gae! Don’t you hear? Mother’s calling.”

She turned at once.

“Nora, my dear, are you deaf?” said her mother patiently. “I called you twice.”

Miss Lisle replied, “Sorry,” with an expressionless face. But as she passed Peter on her way to her mother, he saw a slight colour suffuse her cheek, and she bit her lip.

As they were being packed into the carriage to drive back to the station, he found a moment to say to Miss Dallas — “Miss Lisle is called Nora.”

“Ah,” said she, “that settles it. They are not the people I thought.”

The young man spent next day in the freedom and solitude of Daniel’s boat. They sailed westward, towards the Sept Iles, and he told himself repeatedly how jolly it was to have escaped from the dull talk and tiresome ways of the English party. But there were few minutes during the day when he was not thinking about Miss Lisle. The weather was of fairylike splendour — too good to last. Daniel told him many legends, and they landed at a lonely lighthouse where Peter left tobacco and *Le Petit Journal*. But all the while he was making theories to account for Miss Lisle. She seemed to want accounting for.

As evening fell, he had to acknowledge to himself, that, though he was not in love — that is, if he had

any conception of what being in love is like — yet he had never thought so much or so earnestly about any woman in his life.

As they set their sails for home, they knew that the weather was changing. Daniel had prophesied that morning that wind was coming. They sped back to port, driven by a breeze that freshened to half a gale by the time they reached harbour.

All night the tempest rose, and the storm raged. When day dawned, though there was but small commotion within their Peace Pool, one could see the spray flung up in mountainous columns against the outer side of the rocky barriers, by the great breakers which were hurling themselves upon the teeth of the terrible sea-cliffs.

All the morning the weather continued so wild that Peter wrote letters and read a neglected book in his own room until *déjeuner*. But, at about one o'clock, the wind having lulled a little in sympathy with the outgoing tide, it struck him that it would be a splendid thing to go out as far as the Ile de l'Abbaye and watch the combers hurl themselves against its bastions of red granite.

No sooner thought of than he donned his sou'wester and oilskins, and went forth into the driving rain. He meant to go alone, but as he neared the Grand Hotel, it struck him that Ronald Lisle might care to see such a sight, yet not quite venture to go without a companion. He turned in, therefore, to the *salon* of the hotel, which has a glass door opening upon the road, to ask if he cared to join him.

As he closed the door behind him, shutting out the noise of the wind and sea, he was conscious of music. At the piano was seated Miss Lisle, who was the only person present. She was singing in a low contralto voice, the song of *Reine Anne*, the song of Brittany—"Vive les sabots de bois!"

"Si elle fleurit, cette verveine,
Si elle fleurit, tu seras reine!
A-a-a-ah!
Vive les sabots de bois!"

Peter had never heard the song, but the melody appealed to him instantly, as being a true song of the country. Ever since he had heard Marie-Cynthe singing the "Brave Marin," Miss Lisle had been eagerly seeking for more of such music, but of this she had said nothing to Mr. Garstin. He went softly nearer to her but as soon as she saw him, she stopped abruptly and rose.

"I beg your pardon for disturbing you," he said. "I walked in very unceremoniously, to see if your brother would care to come out with me, over to the Ile de l'Abbaye, to see the waves."

"I'm sorry," she said, "Ronnie has gone with Miss Dallas as far as Lannion. The weather is so bad, they expect to have to wheel their machines most of the way. I don't expect he will be back till late, though of course he will have the wind behind him as he returns."

Peter laughed. "I don't envy anybody cycling against this blast! Very well, I'll take myself off, and

leave you in peace, unless"—these words seemed to follow without his will—"unless you care for a blow yourself?"

Miss Lisle said, "No, thanks," without reflection or hesitation. Then she grew red, and turning to him with a curious air of having remembered something she had forgotten,—“I believe I should like to go out, after all,” she said. “Can you wait while I put on my things?”

“Burberrys, please,” said Peter, “it’s awful weather.”

She disappeared, and he sat down to await her return, with the haunting refrain of the Breton melody in his head.

“A-a-a-ah!

Vive les sabots de bois!”

She was soon down again, in high boots, cloth hat with a little tuft of pheasant’s wing in it, and rain-proof suit. “Fred and Cissie won’t come; they are writing letters,” she said, as if in apology for her solitary appearance.

Peter opened the glass door and they stepped together out into the racing wind, with its salt smack and odour of *goémon*.

“We shall get on better without Mrs. Rusper,” he said cheerfully. “If you don’t mind wet walking, we will go along the sands.” They descended from the road accordingly, and pursued their way among the shells and sand and thick seaweed, out toward the cause-

way of shingle which the receding sea had already left dry.

"We have plenty of time," he said — he had to raise his voice, to be audible in the howling wind — "the tide will not turn for a couple of hours. But we will get on as fast as we can, for we do not want to be cut off on the further isle."

"Don't we?" said Miss Lisle mischievously. "I think it would be rather fun."

"If you take that view," returned Peter, "I wish I had made a few preparations. I have a flask of wine and water, a few biscuits and some chocolate; but I could have done better if I had known you contemplated being marooned."

He spoke hilariously, for he had never before heard her say anything in jest.

"Being unprepared makes it more fun, I think," she said. "You know, you told me, the first time you saw me, that I was a born desert islander."

"Not the first time I saw you — the first time I spoke to you," said Peter. "I had seen you twice before that."

"Your accuracy is rather trying, I think," she returned with a petulance as new to him as her raillery. "Are you always like that?"

"I believe I am a bit exact," he returned, "but it is right to be so, concerning important things."

"Such as seeing people once or twice?"

"Such as seeing you."

The unexpected red overspread her face as though

he had said something unkind. "Am I a sight, to be gazed upon?" she demanded bitterly.

"I really beg your pardon," he said, mystified, answering her tone rather than her words. "Have I said something rude?"

"Something annoying," she murmured, biting her lip. "What is there in me to stare at? You seemed to assume that there was something remarkable in me —"

"There is," he cut in, unable to help smiling. "You are almost the only woman I have met who snubs me continually and rebuffs me on what I consider very small provocation. It seems I am unfortunate enough to be continually displeasing you without knowing it. I can only apologize. I can't even promise not to do it again, because I never know when I *do* do it."

"Oh, how can you say such a thing?" protested the girl, with something like compunction. "How horrid I must be! But I told you my nerves are all jangled, and you said, do you remember? — that you would bear my tantrums patiently."

"I said so, and I meant it. Say anything you please — work off your grudge against fate upon me —"

Again she swept in upon him — "My grudge against fate? What do you mean?"

He was quite taken aback.

"Your grudge against fate for having upset your nerves, or because you have had an illness, as you yourself told me, of course," he explained patiently.

"You are not hinting at, or alluding to — anything?"

“Miss Lisle, what can you mean? Until the other day I had never seen you nor heard of you. I know nothing of you except what I have learnt in our brief acquaintance. How can you accuse me of hints, or allusions? Hints of what? Allusions to what? I feel quite confused by such an accusation.”

Miss Lisle stopped short, and turning to him, held out her hand. “I am sorry,” said she, like a child; “please forgive me. I really won’t be so disgustingly jumpy again. Miss Dallas upset me. She began questioning me about my late illness — do you know the cruelty of such questions? Just when I want to get well and forget it all. I am quite lacerated still, and I have worked off my ill-humour upon you.”

Peter raised his cap rather stiffly. He was deeply annoyed by his companion’s irrational behaviour, and regretted that he had desired her captious company upon his walk. They walked forward along the causeway in a silence which he vowed to himself that he would not break, though he should have to walk at her side mute the whole way out and the whole way back.

CHAPTER V

THE RISING TIDE

"The shock
Of cataract seas that snap
The three-decker's oaken spine
Athwart the ledges of rock,
Here on the Breton strand!"

TENNYSON.

THE rain had stopped. Banks of clouds were plunging across the heavens as wildly as the waves were racing across the sea.

Peter and Miss Lisle stood together upon the Ile de l'Abbaye.

Above high-water mark its landward surface was covered with bracken and bright with heather bloom, wild thyme, sea lavender and thrift. Before them were the foundations of a little watch tower which in old days had supported a lighthouse. This was flanked by the remains of fortifications long since crumbled to ruin.

There was a kind of waist to the land upon which they stood — a place at which the sea came in on both sides simultaneously, dividing at high tide the Ile de l'Abbaye from what was known as the Ile des Femmes.

All the way, since the lady's petulant outbreak, Peter had not spoken a word. He walked along with

his most superior expression, wondering what were her thoughts as she trod beside him with so springy a step. Ah, if he could but have known!

They came to a halt just below the ruins, and found themselves suddenly in the lee of the wind, in a warm silence and sheltered calm.

"Oh! How perfectly delicious!" cried Miss Lisle. "Do sniff the scent of the fern! Is it not lovely? I believe the sun will come out in a minute!"

She had spoken! And Peter's ill-humour vanished, for he had won!

"Do you feel the charm of it?" he asked. "I walked out here on Sunday, and tried to fancy what it must have been to live here altogether. Daniel tells me that in the days of the Abbaye, there was a cathedral here with twenty-four doors, and a monastery with six hundred monks!"

"What, on this wretched little isle?"

"In prehistoric days, I fancy. The only remnant now is that bit of wall down there in the hollow. But they use it as a graveyard for the corpses of shipwrecked sailors washed up by the sea, and of whose creed they are ignorant." He pointed to a row of grassy mounds. "One may hope that they are at rest in consecrated ground."

The girl seated herself upon the grass, and drew in long breaths of delight.

"I like this," she said. "I like it more than I have liked anything, for weeks past. I relished the struggle against the wind, and I enjoy the peace of this respite." She raised her eyes to Peter who stood look-

ing away from her, out to sea. "Mr. Garstin," she said coaxingly.

He turned, and she made a motion with her hand for him to sit beside her. "I wish this was the first time that we had met, you and I," she said. "I have been horrid ever since you knew me, haven't I?"

"Not horrid," said Peter drily. "Shall we say difficult?"

"If you like. I *have* been horrid, though, and your voice says you cannot forget it. I wish one could forget. What a fortune for somebody who could discover the waters of Lethe, of which anybody with a sin or a grief could drink and have peace. . . . But the only thing left to us is to pretend, isn't it? Shall we pretend that we have never met before in our lives till just this minute? I believe we should get on much better if you would."

"I think that's quite a good scheme. Let me introduce myself.—Peter Garstin, more or less briefless barrister, of the Inner Temple, cursed with private means, almost without kith or kin, and hampered by an eclectic taste in book-bindings."

"Delighted to meet you," she returned promptly. "I return your confidence. I am — Gaenor Lisle." There was the ring of a challenge in her voice.

"Gaenor?" he said, surprised. "What a queer name! I never heard it before."

He looked at her, puzzled, and thought her unusually pale. "You never heard it?" she said under her breath.

"Never. How do you spell it?"

A shudder passed over her as she complied. She was recalling the last occasion upon which she had been requested to spell her curious name. In these few minutes she had taken a grim resolution, crossed the Rubicon, and found herself safely upon the other side.

"It's the name of a Welsh ancestress in our family records. Mother calls me Nora. But Ronnie calls me Gae, which must seem to you singularly inappropriate."

"Not at this moment," said Peter.

She went on. "There's very little to tell about me. I am as uneducated as most girls of my class. I have played some golf and done a little riding and so on. I don't think I am very domestic. My sister Cissie has absorbed all the domesticity. She married at nineteen and lives in West Hampstead. I am twenty-three. I haven't made up my mind yet whether I want to emigrate to a very wild colony, or marry a millionaire. I won't attend an Art School or learn cookery, or do any of those things that girls take up, in order to fill empty lives."

"How does life come to be empty for anybody? That is what I can never understand," said Peter.

"Of course you can't, because you are independent. But suppose that, when you wanted to do anything, you had to go to your papa and say, 'Please give me a little money—say, thirty pounds'—and suppose he replied—'That's all very well, but you must tell me exactly how you are going to spend it.' Would not life be empty then?"

"I think it might be," he owned. "The world is rough on girls."

She gave a laugh that held strange depths of bitterness.

"Oh, you are right there," she said.

He had a movement of deep sympathy. "Your people seem to keep you very tight," he remarked.

"They don't trust me at all," she replied, in a dreary, matter-of-fact way. "Sometimes I think I shall run away in the night. But, you see, I never have any money." She laughed a little. "This is not preliminary to borrowing of you," she assured him. "Don't be alarmed."

"It would not alarm me to lend you money if you wanted it," he replied calmly. She flinched visibly, as if at a hateful memory.

"Oh, don't!" said she.

"Not that I want to encourage you to run away," continued he. "On the contrary, I particularly wish you to stay until I have thought of some suggestion for filling your empty life."

He said this with such perfect gravity as to leave her in real doubt as to what he meant. Was he flirting? Was he simply anxious to help her? Or was he, as she thought more likely, angling to see how she would take his words?

Jest was the only way out. "Do you keep a registry office?" she asked.

"I haven't established one yet, but I often think it rather a noble calling. There are so many things people want and can't get. There must be deep satisfac-

tion in bringing together the woman who wants a cook, and the cook she wants."

"I fancy that happens very, very seldom —"

—"Probably. Or, like the house-agent in Chesterton's story who let arboreal houses. . . . By the way, I wonder if one could buy this island?"

"In my present mood," said Gaenor, "I feel as if I could live here always. But, if you are going to make an offer for it, we must go into all the rooms and discover all the advantages. I imagine the sea-view is one strong point, and we have not so much as glimpsed that yet, have we?"

"Come on," said Peter, jumping up and holding out his hands to raise her from the ground. "What an ass I am, when I once begin to chatter."

"It was my fault. I encouraged you," she replied. "I also am addicted to vague talk."

They climbed the bit of wall between themselves and the seaward bounds of the isle, and found themselves in a moment exposed to the wild blast. The thunder of the waves was deafening, they could not speak, they could only sign to each other, as they moved with caution along the exposed bit of grassy hillock, to where the sea thrashed and churned in a deep narrow cleft between granite jaws encrusted with limpets.

The tide was dead low. They could swing themselves down, cross the cleft, and clamber with ease up the terraced walls, where, in every sheltered spot, turf, vividly green, had spread itself like a rug. The climbing was so easy, and the shelter so good, that they went on, stimulated by the racy air, and at last found them-

selves upon the pinnacle of the outermost cliff, above the turmoil of the lashing seas.

They lay down, to present as little obstacle to the wind as possible, and in that position, propped upon their elbows, gazed down fascinated into the riot of the forces of the world.

For a time neither spoke. The water plunged and roared and seethed, battered eternally against the terrible teeth of the *chevaux de frise* erected by nature. Out at sea the white horses tossed their manes, and almost might one descry the wild sea riders who urged them on, like charging cavalry, against the helpless, motionless land. But, when they reached it, their fury was curbed, their rage checked — ‘Thus far shalt thou go and no farther,’ said the passive bastions. Then the sea-monsters broke and dispersed howling, to gather again and again, endlessly and for ever in the strife between land and sea which shall not cease until the judgment day.

At last, after a prolonged contemplation, Gaenor turned her glowing face toward Peter — surprising a look which had been bent upon her and not upon the labouring main.

“I sometimes wish I couldn’t swim,” she remarked.

It was such an irrelevant thing to say that he had no reply to make but a vacant, “Why?”

“It would be so easy to drop oneself into that cauldron and end it all,” she replied dreamily. “A minute or two and it would be all over. But, for a swimmer, there is always the desperate chance of being drawn out of the vortex by some current, and be-

ing compelled by instinct to fight for life, till the last. And that would be horrible."

"You are being horrible now," said Peter severely.

"I'm so sorry. I won't say anything of the kind again. You shall decide what we are to talk about. Remember, we have never met until to-day, and we shall in all probability never meet again. We are to live in the present. Talk to me; tell me the legends that Daniel tells you."

Peter was nothing loath. He told her of the landing of the brutal English upon St. Gildas, and their carrying off with them the chapel bell. But the bell had no mind to be a prisoner in hated Albion, so as they sailed out of the port, it threw itself overboard, and fell into the sea, where now you may still hear it toll on wild nights, when the sea is rough. There were many other delightful folk-stories, and Gaenor evidently appreciated them; and as the young man talked, suddenly, with the shock of some tremendous happening, out darted the sun and illumined the waste of waters and the misty distances, turning the leaden sea to glittering phantasy, and extracting from both the spectators a deep-drawn "Oh!" of something like awe.

Almost at the same moment, a gigantic sea hurled itself up at their eyrie, as if in malice, and flung a handful of foam and spray into their faces.

"Hallo! The tide is making," said Peter. "We have time in hand but we had better be too soon than too late with our getting across."

They began their descent, in high spirits, cheered by the warmth of the sun, which held its own against

the plunging masses of storm cloud. As they went, Peter made a few scathing remarks about the folly of persons who got caught by the tide on such places as that in which they now were. "It isn't as if the tide were a capricious thing," he truly remarked. "It is as regular as the moon. One always knows how long one has."

They went on gaily, but found when they reached the bottom of the cleft up whose sides they had climbed, that the tide had filled it faster than they could have imagined. Peter was quite equal to the occasion, and soon found the best and quickest way to get round dry-shod: but it took them considerably longer than they had expected.

"Which shows," said Peter, "the wisdom of being ahead of time on an expedition like this."

When they had got back as far as the outer wall of the fortifications, the outlook was almost terrifying. The wind was rising afresh with the mounting tide, and even inside the bay the waves were high and threatening. As Peter surveyed the tossing waste of waters, he saw that they would have a near thing of it, and had not a moment to lose.

"The wind is driving in the sea at a great rate," he said. "We had better hurry a little, I think, just until we have crossed to the Ile des Femmes."

"Very good," said Gaenor with sparkling eyes. "I do love this! I am so glad we came! I hope there is just a tiny spice of danger, do say there is."

"Oh, no," replied the young man, "there is none — unless some unforeseen casualty —"

As he spoke, it happened.

Gaenor, who had been climbing over the broken masonry which lay about the foot of the ruined *Phare*, jumped into long grass and fell, with a smothered cry.

Peter hurried up, and she made a great effort to spring to her feet before he came but sank down again with an abrupt paling of cheeks and lips which showed that she was in acute pain.

"What is it? What have you done?" he asked, as he stooped over her.

"Oh, I can't think! I stepped into a hole, and — and I felt something snap — a bone or a tendon or something. Oh, what a fool I am, what an *idiot*! . . . It will go off in a minute, I expect. It *must* go off!" She ceased speaking, and he thought she would faint. He whipped out his flask of wine and water, and held some to her lips. She took it shakily, and after a few moments, during which she seemed to rally all her forces to avoid bursting into tears, she drank it. Then she whispered faintly. "Give me two minutes, please, by your watch. Then I shall be ready to go on."

He did so — turning away from her without a word, seeing that her pain was so great that she feared to lose control.

After three minutes he came back to her side. "Is the agony at all abated?" he asked.

She nodded, biting her lip. "But I am afraid it is swelling," she faltered. "What shall I do? It is so important that we should go on at once —"

"We must first ascertain what is wrong," said

Peter. "I am much afraid you have sprained your ankle. Let me look at it. We shall lose no time in the end by attending to it promptly."

"Did you ever know anything so exasperating — so futile?" she complained. "Just like the young woman in a penny novel, who always sprains her ankle at the critical moment, and the young man has to bear her slender form ten miles to the nearest railway station! I give you notice, you shall not carry me a yard!"

"That remains to be seen," said Peter primly, surveying the foot, laced in its tan calf boot. "I wonder if I ought to take off the boot? If I do, we shall never get it on again."

"I am desperately afraid that I must have it off, the pain is so great," gasped Gaenor. "How far is it from here to the place where we cross to the Ile des Femmes?"

"Just about a mile, I think," said Peter tranquilly. She made a gesture of despair.

"I can't walk it!"

"But you might limp, leaning on my shoulder, perhaps. You see if I can once get you across, I can run home from there and bring a boat; but I doubt a boat being able to take you off from here, apart from the fact that I don't like to leave you alone."

"Oh," she said, wiping her eyes, "I said I wanted a spice of danger, didn't I? But not a *bêtise* like this! There is no danger at all, nothing but just annoyance for you! How you must wish you had never seen me."

"Well," said Peter, "we won't discuss that now. I

feel inclined to unlace this boot, take off your stocking, tear handkerchiefs to strips, soak them in sea-water, bind up your foot, and then let you try and limp along."

She would not accept the idea that she could not walk until she had actually tried to stand upon her feet. The pain was too severe for her to bear. She submitted then to the unlacing of the boot, and the revealing of the foot, puffed out into shapelessness. Peter actually had a threaded needle in a pocketbook. "Bachelors have to take these precautions," he said simply. They tore their handkerchiefs into strips, sewed them together, soaked them in a sea-pool, and bandaged the foot quite scientifically, fastening the bandage in place with the aid of the stocking.

"Oh, it is you who are the desert islander!" cried Gaenor. "Just fancy! Wine and water and needle and thread!"

"Now," said Peter, "you must put your arm across my shoulder, and I must, with profound apologies, put mine around your waist and you must hop." She obeyed quite meekly.

"You need not worry," he told her. "It is not as if we were very far from home. All that will happen will be that I shall have to swim across, and leave you here while I go and get a boat."

CHAPTER VI

A NIGHT OUT

"Qu'il prenne garde! La mer monte!"

ANATOLE LEBRAZ.

THEY proceeded upon their way with difficulty.

Peter preserved his impersonal manner with some success, but as a matter of fact, he was conscious of profound troubling of the senses, as he felt his arm encircle the warm, supple body of the strange girl. When he had half dragged, half lifted her along for some way, he said, with a sort of exasperation, "You had better throw up the sponge and let me carry you outright. I shall have to keep on putting you down and resting, but it will be better than this."

"Oh, no, no, don't let us be so Family Herald," she pleaded. "It is too silly. You had better dump me down and leave me here, and let me crawl along at my own pace, and meanwhile you can swim across and get help. Oh, I *shall* catch it from my people! Why did you persuade me to come at all? I only bring misfortune!"

"I don't know that I did much persuading," said Peter shortly.

"That's true, too," she sighed, "but you might say you did, if father and mother pitch into me."

"Certainly," he responded. "I don't mind shouldering all the blame."

"That is indeed noble of you. Thank you very much and good-bye. Leave me a book, if you have one in your pocket, and get back as fast as you can."

"I am going to carry you on a bit farther first," he declared calmly. "This is too far off to leave you. I must put you in shelter, and in a place where I can find you again when I want you."

"How you domineer!" said Gaenor.

"Nonsense," said Peter; "this is mere common-sense."

"A thing I don't understand," responded the lady tartly, as she submitted to be lifted into his arms.

"Now help me all you can," admonished Peter. "Put your arm round my neck and try to rest some of your weight upon it, so that my arms don't get it all. That's the way. Mercifully you are not at all heavy — absurdly light, in fact — but I shall not want to carry you many miles, for all that."

"Oh, that wasn't at all the right thing to say," said the girl flippantly. "You should have said — 'As her light weight rested like a feather upon his iron muscles, he felt that this moment was worth all the trouble and anxiety that had gone before.'"

"So it is," said Peter unexpectedly.

"That's right — let us play the game," she went on, with a sound of mirth. "Araminta, finding herself overpowered and carried off in a strong man's arms, dreaded nothing so much as that he should discover

the true state of her feeling towards him! 'Ah,' she sighed, 'didst thou but know, O noble stranger, the commotion excited in this shy heart by thy condescension,—' Oh! Don't stop so suddenly! You should give me a little warning!"

"Only to rest you on my knee a minute," said Peter laughing, "and to get my breath! Go on about Araminta, it takes my attention off my superhuman efforts."

He had planted his foot upon a boulder, so as to be able to let her weight rest upon his knee. This brought their faces on a level and his was alive with fun and full of an expression of which she had not previously deemed it capable. "Knowing his modesty, his strict sense of propriety, she trembled lest he should deem her conduct unmaidenly," she drolled on. "And at last, summoning all her courage—'Ah, gallant stranger,' she sighed, 'how reluctantly I burden thee with my helpless form! But know that Araminta's gratitude—'"

"Now!" said Peter, "that's the point I wanted to arrive at! Araminta's gratitude! What form do you suppose it might take?"

She clasped her hands, looking upwards with a mock air of ecstasy. "Noble deliverer, rest assured that Araminta will make to thee the highest award in her power. Not only will she remember thee in her maiden's prayer, but she will also undertake never to accompany thee upon a sea walk again so long as ye both shall live!"

Peter laughed out in boyish delight, as he caught

her up again and staggered gallantly on. With the help of such nonsense they managed somehow to cover the mile of broken, and in many places marshy ground which lay between them and the channel for which they were making. The trend of the ground had shut out the sea from Peter's view until they had come near the crossing-place.

When at last he saw it, he stopped, and carefully deposited Araminta upon a large stone, while he uttered a long whistle of consternation.

The tide had rushed in upon both sides, and was clashing together furiously in the midst. The violence of the gale seemed to increase with every minute. The sun had disappeared behind purple cloud wrack in the west; there would be a night of storm. He looked at his watch. It was six o'clock. The tide had been low at four. It would again be approaching low water at about four o'clock in the morning.

He was a good swimmer, but he had never yet swum in a stormy sea, and did not know his own powers. His arms were tired with the weight he had just been carrying, and he felt very doubtful of succeeding in crossing the welter of waves, which was now quite wide. Had he seen Miss Lisle struggling therein, he would, without hesitation have plunged to the rescue: but he doubted the wisdom of taking risks, and leaving her alone and helpless, exposed perhaps, should he strike his head against a rock, to the long-drawn mental torture of a lonely night in wild weather in a most wild spot.

He sat down beside Gaenor and looked steadily at

her. "Do you know, I believe I funk that swim," he said sturdily.

She looked anxiously at him. "Do you mean that you will not go?" she asked. "But what then can we do? I own that I shall dislike being left out here alone, with dusk falling; but we must do something."

"Nobody can help accidents," he said, after a pause. "I think we must make the best of it."

"Stay here all night?" she asked, in a strange voice.

"I don't see any help for it."

The girl grew as white as a sheet. "There must be some help for it," she said urgently. "I appeal to you, as a man, a gentleman. Can't you do something — anything — to prevent our being left out here all night?"

"I can do all in my power to make it less unbearable for you," he said simply, "and Mr. and Mrs. Lisle will surely understand. One cannot foresee a sprained ankle."

She wrung her hands together with a desperation which seemed to him overstrained. "Could you not signal to the shore?" she asked. "Clamber up to the cone, and fly a signal?"

He answered. "I thought of that. But we have torn up our handkerchiefs, and I don't think it would be wise to take off our coats, for the cold will be very great during the night, and there is the chance of this furious wind blowing away anything we fastened up. By the way, did you tell your people where we were going?"

"I said, to look at the waves."

"Then they will not know where to look for us. I'm afraid they will be fearfully anxious and they always seem so careful of you. Perhaps, after all, I had better make the attempt to swim. I expect I should do all right; but I should have to carry my coat and boots on my head, and that might bother me in such rough water."

"And look at all that seaweed!" she cried; "masses and masses of it! Suppose you were to be entangled . . . you must not try!"

"Half an hour ago I might have done it," he said, "but now it is getting worse every minute. And before starting I should have to carry you back quite a long way, because in an hour or so the place where we stand will be under water, and crippled as you are, I don't think you could get away in time." He reflected for a moment. "The best thing to do," he decided at last, "is to go back to the ruins, where we are well sheltered from the wind and high above sea-level, even on a stormy night. Then I will rig up a signal somehow, and do my best until it gets dark — Oh, yes, by Jove! As soon as dark falls, we'll light a fire — that will be the best thing to do — there is plenty of seaweed and bracken and some bits of drift-wood!"

"But it is all so wet —"

"No! Some that has been underneath is still fairly dry and we have had an hour or two's sunshine — I shall find ways and means. Cheer up, Araminta, thy

suffering shall not be prolonged a moment longer than is quite necessary."

The notion of the beacon fire did cheer Araminta enormously. She submitted to be carried back most of the way which toilsomely they had come. As they ascended the beach the violent tide pursued them. In an incredibly short space of time a whole sea seemed to roll between themselves and the Ile des Femmes, which looked quite distant in the cold gloaming.

By the time they found themselves once more under the ruined wall, Peter was rather done up, and had to lie for a while on his back, getting back his breath.

Gaenor at this moment remembered that he had wine in his pocket. At her suggestion they ate the biscuits and most of the chocolate, and each had a dose, as she called it, of wine. There remained two sticks of chocolate, and two more small doses of stimulant, in case of emergencies. Peter, thus refreshed, commenced operations by cutting a good supply of heather with which to make a warm resting-place for his companion, who was by now in considerable pain, to which was evidently added a distress of mind for which he could not account.

This made him the more anxious to make a blaze, and attract the attention of those on shore.

Unfortunately, his matchbox was not very well stocked. One grows a little mean over matches in a country where you only get twenty very bad ones for a penny. However, he had a dozen or so, one of which he sacrificed to light his own pipe, a solace he sorely needed. Then he collected materials for a fire, selected

his spot with care and science and set himself to make a blaze. His fuel, however, had been so drenched with rain that it was some time before he was successful, and he had to use nearly all his matches. At last he had it roaring finely. He was quite sure that this fire must be visible from the shore; he himself could plainly see the lights of the village as one by one they twinkled out in the dusk, fast changing into the inky blackness of a moonless night of storm.

And then, just as all was going well, down came the rain, positively in sheets.

The need to get the lady in his charge under shelter came first. Near by was a small stone shelter, no bigger than a sentry-box, used by the coastguards if or when they had to keep a look-out at this point.

In this, they were under cover both from wind and rain, and, surrounded by cut heather, they could be warm as well as dry. But the beacon fire was out; as hopelessly as though colossal feet had trodden it into the earth.

While the rain continued to descend so heavily, it was not the least use to try to rekindle it. There was nothing for it but to huddle together into the little stone box, and for Peter to try to raise the drooping spirit of his companion.

Her agitation had disappeared. It was succeeded by a stony calm, as of despair. Her vehement dislike of the situation almost amounted to deliberate discourtesy; and, after a good deal of hesitation, Peter said so in nicely chosen words. He pointed out that neither of them was to blame — that their expedition

had been marred by an untoward accident — that all that remained to them was to make the best of it. She replied, in tones of utter dreariness, that she was very sorry to be so discouraging, but perhaps it was the pain in her foot that made her take a more gloomy view of things. Upon this, he occupied himself by unrolling the bandages, somewhat displaced by the peregrinations of the poor patient, dipping them anew in cold water, and applying them with the utmost gentleness, by the light of one more precious match.

She was really grateful for his long-suffering kindness, and said so. But evidently she was feeling too dismayed, too completely cast down to rally. Even the thought of Araminta had no power to make her smile.

Peter could not help resenting it. He told himself that she could not have been safer with her own father, and he thought she ought to have recognized this. His own feeling was so different from hers, as to place it in sharp contrast. They had met with a vexatious contretemps for which nobody was to blame. Its result was to throw him for many hours into close companionship with a girl who, as he would have said, intrigued him strangely. Until to-day he had never felt the force of feminine fascination. He was far from understanding the girl, but she piqued him, with that hint of mystery which is, to many men, the most subtle form of charm.

He felt genuinely grieved that a check should have been put upon their newly begun friendship by the afternoon's events; but it was, he saw, useless to

coax her or to argue with her. He had no clue to the revolt against fate which was raging in her heart. He lapsed into silence, and after a time was conscious that she slept.

The rain continued to fall fast for several hours — those precious hours during which the inhabitants of the village would be most likely to see a signal. But all this time the violence of the storm was so great that it would have been difficult to bring a boat to their rescue. About midnight, sleep overcame him too.

He awoke with a start, to find a faint lightening in the gloom of the surrounding darkness. He experienced a shock of horror in finding that Gaenor was no longer by his side. But almost at once he saw that she had slipped from the seat to the ground, and was asleep, curled up in the heather, with her head against his knee.

His slight movement awakened her. "Has it stopped raining?" she asked, in a faint, husky voice which suggested that she had been weeping.

"I am going out to look," he replied. She sat up, and he went out of the hut.

The clouds had dispersed, and he saw stars. By the light of a match, his watch showed it to be a quarter to two o'clock.

He gazed searchingly at the place where the village ought to be, but saw no light, nor any sign of commotion.

Returning to her, he said, "If we set out now, by the time I get you down to the crossing place, the tide ought to be quite low enough for us to get over."

All the fern and stuff is so wet that I doubt if I can kindle the fire again — at least, not without great delay. I have only two matches left, but if you wish me to try, I will."

"No," she said hurriedly, "don't let us wait. I can get along, with a stick, and your arm. We might possibly be home before daylight, don't you think? — if we make haste."

"I hope so," he answered, "but first let us eat what is left of our provisions."

They did as he suggested, and then he stooped and carefully lifted the girl from the ground. As he did so, she began to sob, as if his kindness touched some unbearable chord. He sat down upon the wooden seat beside her, and took her hand, patting it sympathetically. "Come, come," he said, "you are making too much of all this. Worse things happen at sea, you know. In a couple of hours you will be safe in bed, and laughing to think of this night."

"You don't understand," she replied, and her long-drawn sobs continued.

"I'm so unused to girls," confessed Peter penitently. "I never knew one at all intimately. Have I said or done anything to make this thing worse to you?"

Her reply burst from her. "Oh, no, no, you have been — just adorably kind. But — but — I am always doing heedless things — getting into hot water — and it did seem so hard — so unjust, because this time, I c-couldn't help it, could I?"

"Of course not. And I am here to explain mat-

ters," he said almost impatiently. "Unless your father and mother are far more unreasonable people than I suppose them to be, they will understand at once."

"Well!" she dashed away her tears. "Fancy your having seen me cry!" she said, in a voice which expressed bitter mortification. "I, who never cry, who am supposed to be utterly hard and callous! Well, you must forget it, won't you? Forget all about this night, and to-morrow, remember that we made a bargain that this day was to stand all by itself, with no to-morrow and no yesterday —"

"Take care," said Peter, somewhat unsteadily, "you are giving me a tremendous hold over you —"

She recoiled. "A hold over me?"

"If we share this day between us?"

"But we must not! You have got to dig it up and bury it, burn it, do away with it somehow!"

"Never, while I live!" affirmed Peter.

CHAPTER VII

THE RETURN OF THE CULPRITS

"La petite ville se tassait, toute noire, sur le gris de Phorizon, de l'autre côté d'une de ces grèves profondes que l'Océan creuse dans les failles de la terre bretonne, et que le flot ne visite guère qu'aux grandes marées d'équinoxe."

ANATOLE LEBRAZ.

AFTER tea Mrs. Lisle and her husband, noting the improvement in the weather, went for a stroll. It was almost time for table d'hôte when they returned, a good deal wind-buffed and longing for a change into easy slippers, a good meal and a rest.

Cissie Rusper, who was watching for them in the glass-walled salon, ran out into the passage to intercept them.

"Gaenor's off again," she said eagerly, under her breath.

Mrs. Lisle stopped short. Her face expressed keen mortification. Since Peter came to Porz Gwenn she had been nursing a small, sickly hope. It fainted within her at Cissie's news.

"My dear, it isn't dinner-time yet, and I knew she was out for a walk —"

"The dinner bell has just rung, and she has been out since a quarter past one."

"Perhaps Ronnie is with her?"

"Oh, no, Mr. Garstin is with her," said Cissie primly, taking off her mother's waterproof, as she spoke.

"Mr. Garstin is with her? Oh, Cissie, why did you give me such a fright? If he is with her, she is all right. They may be in any minute. Has Ronnie come back?"

"Oh, yes, he's been in over an hour. Well, mamma, you may be content, but Fred and I think it a great pity that she should be starting her old ways again as soon as ever a young man appears on the horizon."

"Hold your tongue, Cissie," said her father, red with annoyance; "that is not the way to speak of your sister, and she has done nothing to deserve it."

"Did you know she was going out with Mr. Garstin?" asked her mother.

"Yes," Cissie had to admit, "she came to our room and asked if we would go with them. I understood they were going to some point on the coast, to look at waves. We didn't feel inclined to go, it was raining cats and dogs and blowing a gale."

"And Ronnie was out, so she had to go with Mr. Garstin or stay at home," said Mrs. Lisle quite snappily. "Since you are so anxious about Gae's conduct, you might make some attempt to look after her, I think, Cissie."

"Oh, if you and father are content, it is no business of mine," retorted Cissie, vexed, and turning away she walked into the *salle à manger*.

There was a pause, while the two parents looked at one another.

"In a place like this — so uncereemonious — there

can be no harm in a walk together," said Mrs. Lisle slowly.

"To tell you the truth, I am both glad and surprised to hear she went. She has not seemed to me to be encouraging him at all," replied her husband.

"Ah, my dear," sighed the mother, "neither did she ever seem to be, in the other case. You never can tell what Gae is intending, or thinking about."

"Take care," he said testily, "you will not remember to call her Nora."

They descended, a few minutes later, to dine, and as the courses passed round they grew fidgety. When dinner was over, they were anxious. Mrs. Lisle felt irritable, because the attitude of the two Ruspers was a silent embodiment of "I told you so!"

"You might go out and stroll along the coast, Ronnie," pleaded the mother, "and see if you meet them coming back."

"That's all right, Mums, but which way? Where would they be likely to go?"

The owner of the hotel was summoned, and asked where anybody who really wanted to see waves would be likely to go. He said there was hardly any doubt that they had gone to Plouganan. That lay to the east along the coast, past Bugellez — a long way, but the rocks were magnificent when you got there.

"That is what has happened," said Ronald. "They did not know how far they were going, and got tempted on and on. You may depend they are hurrying back for all they are worth. You see the mischief of this place is there are none of the appliances of civiliza-

tion. I suppose it would not be possible to hire a carriage."

The landlord, appealed to, had great doubts of any vehicle being procurable at Plouganen to drive to Porz Gwenn late in the evening. To ease his mother's apprehensions, Ronald suggested exploring in that direction, but the landlord was doubtful. There were two ways of reaching Bugellez. In the shorter, you followed the cliff for a couple of miles—but it would be difficult walking in this wild weather. He had heard that the sea was half-way up the cliff at high tide this morning. The other route, by which they would probably return, was all the way round by the railway station at Penellik. They might get a trap when they reached the *gare*.

Finally, Ronald went off, along the village, and up the hill as far as the semaphore in a direction exactly opposite to the Ile de l'Abbaye. The rain was descending in sheets, and he met neither pedestrian nor carriage. He returned, dog tired, since his Lannion excursion had been by no means an easy one, expecting to find that the truants had meanwhile arrived home by way of the cliff path. But they had not.

He then counselled inaction. Garstin, he represented, was a thoroughly capable fellow, to whom they had all, during the last week or two, entrusted themselves for guidance. There was no doubt of his bringing Gae safe home, and, as nobody knew where they had gone, it was idle to wander about in the night in search of them.

Everybody agreed as to the wisdom of these argu-

ments, and Ronald, wet and fagged, went off to rest. The hours passed, and no news came. At midnight they were still up and watching. About half an hour later, the landlord came to say that a woman in the village thought she had seen, just as dusk was falling, a fire or blaze out upon the Ile de l'Abbaye. She said it only lasted about ten minutes, but that was probably because the rain put it out. If this witness was correct, it meant that the lady and gentleman had got cut off by the tide. But he did not counsel the sending out of a boat, since in such a sea, the landing would be difficult; it would be a longish matter to rouse Daniel and get him off at this time of night, and in less than two hours the tide would be low enough for them to walk off of themselves.

Everybody caught at this suggestion, as accounting satisfactorily for the non-appearance of the two defaulters.

Cissie Rusper tried to conceal her triumph, and Mr. and Mrs. Lisle seemed panic-stricken. However, they took all measures to ensure the warding off of such chills as might result from exposure to what Dr. Rusper called the fury of the elements. The landlord prepared hot soup and lit a fire, and, as soon as it seemed likely that the tide was low enough for the crossing to be made, Mr. Lisle and his son-in-law, guided by a native, set out for the sands, to see if they could descry any signs of the missing pair.

The faint beginnings of dawn were outlining the rocks and waves dark against a background a shade less black, when they saw something move, at the oppo-

site end of the shingle causeway which stretches from the beach of the Ile des Femmes. They could not make out what it was — it hardly seemed the shape of a human figure, but they shouted as loud as they could. The figure paused in its advance, and after a moment, answered the shout. It then continued to come forward, but so slowly that they were consumed with impatience. Suddenly Dr. Rusper cried, "He is carrying her — Garstin has got her in his arms."

"She is dead!" groaned Mr. Lisle. "Good God! How often she has threatened it! But her mother and I would never believe that it was more than hysterical nonsense! She has thrown herself into the sea, and he is bringing back her dead body. Merciful Heaven! Perhaps Craven will be satisfied now!"

"Here," said Dr. Rusper, "take the lantern, I will go on with this man, and help him. *Venez, venez,*" he said, beckoning the Breton peasant to accompany him.

They stepped out upon the shingle, buffeted by wind and spray, their feet sinking into the crunchy mass. When Garstin saw them approaching, he stopped, and lowered the burden he carried.

The doctor quickened his steps. "That you Garstin?" he called eagerly as he drew near.

"Yes. It is us," replied Peter, in a voice which he made audible only with an effort.

"Why, bless me, what's — what's the matter?" cried Rusper.

"Miss Lisle has had an accident," replied Peter, with a queer listlessness.

Gaenor was sitting on the shingle at his feet, wholly

oblivious of appearances, with her head resting against his leg. But she was conscious. She lifted her wet, wan face, and, as the light of the lantern fell upon it, Peter, in the midst of his fatigue, thought he had never seen anything so wonderful as that small face, anything so poignant as its expression.

"Have you got a man there?" he asked. "If so, join arms, and make a chair to carry her. I'm — I'm about done."

"I should think so!" cried Rusper, stooping to stare into his sister-in-law's face. "You're not dead then, Nora?"

"Unfortunately, no," was the weak and faltering answer. "Get me home somehow, Fred, for pity's sake."

"I have some brandy," said the doctor, his professional instinct coming to the rescue. "Better give her a little — eh?"

"Please. I should be glad of some, too," admitted Peter.

Mr. Lisle, from the shore, began to cry impatient questions as to why they delayed. Peter took the cup from Rusper's hand, and stooping, gave the girl to drink as though ministering to a sick child. Then he drank himself, and, tired out as he was, a thrill shot through him as he put his lips where hers had been.

"An accident, eh?" said Fred. "A slip over the cliffs, was it?"

Peter disliked both tone and question. "Not exactly," replied he, with coldness and some offence. Dr. Rusper glanced keenly at him and made up his mind that there was something to hide — that a straight-

forward version of the accident would not be given. "Miss Lisle has sprained her ankle," Peter added. "It is bound up, and your best plan will be to get her home first of all, before you touch it."

This was dictatorial, but the doctor bore it meekly — for the present. Peter turned to the Breton, and made him understand what was required of him. The doctor and he clasped hands, and Peter once more lifted the small forlorn figure into his arms with grave, dispassionate care, and seated her upon the seat so formed, an arm round each man's neck. Then the small procession tramped slowly to the shore.

"Nora, is that you?" cried her father's voice, with a note in it which Peter resented — a note of cold anger.

Gaenor did not reply. She was, as one says, at the end of her tether.

"She is not dead?" he cried out sharply, and at that, she answered, "Oh, no, Papa. Please get me home first. I have sprained my ankle."

"Well, upon my word!" he exclaimed, in deep displeasure as he turned and followed the bearers along the road to the hotel. "I wonder what next. Mr. Garstin, I look to you for an explanation."

"Do you?" said Peter wearily. "Well, I think Miss Lisle can do the explaining. We allowed plenty of time to escape the tide, but her accident unavoidably delayed us. I shall be happy to go more fully into our movements to-morrow. But now, if you will excuse me, I think I will take myself off to bed."

"Certainly, certainly. You must be very tired."

"And hungry," admitted Peter. "But that is soon

mended. It is fortunate that you have a doctor with you, as there is no English doctor within miles of this place."

"It is, indeed! May I just ask, before we part, how my daughter came to sprain her ankle?"

"Oh, she just slipped — and her foot went into a hole," said Peter vaguely, and to Mr. Lisle, as well as to his son-in-law, his manner conveyed the impression that he was making up a tale. They both felt certain that Gaenor had attempted suicide. Her clothing was indeed wet enough to warrant the idea that she had been in the water, for they had been covered with spray in their eagerness to get across the channel before the waves had left it dry. He had no time to enquire further, for at the moment they reached the hotel, where Mrs. Lisle and Cissie were at the window awaiting them, and Peter, with a hurried excuse, went off to his own quarters, to knock up Madame Tissot and persuade her to give him hot drinks and a bath.

CHAPTER VIII

PETER PROPOSES

"But I am in for it now — *laissez faire*, of a truth, *laissez aller*,
Yes, I am going,— I feel it, I feel and cannot recall it,—
Fusing with this thing and that, entering into all sorts of relations,
Tying I know not what ties."

A. H. CLOUGH.

PETER sent down for news next morning to the Grand Hotel. He himself thought it wiser to remain in bed all day, not so much on account of his health as in order not to be bothered with the Lisle family. He declined to see even Ronald, bidding Madame Tissot assure him that repose was absolutely necessary.

In fact, he needed solitude and reflection.

He had been out all night upon a desert island, with a girl who attracted him in a way no other girl had previously done. He wanted to analyse his feeling about Gaenor.

He did not desire, as he imagined lovers mostly do, to embrace her passionately, to kiss her tenderly. He wanted to know more about her thoughts and feelings; conspicuously and especially what she thought of him. It seemed to him, viewing the situation impartially, that he had not nearly reached the period in their acquaintance at which a proposal would be appropriate. Yet he felt that there was a pressing reason why he

should make his offer immediately. This arose from the girl's panic terror at the idea of a night out with him, and the unpleasant impression he had received of the anger of her father, the only half-veiled contempt of her brother-in-law. From the first, he had resented the family attitude towards her. If he had done anything to increase the disfavour with which they seemed to regard her, the least he could do was surely to offer to take her away, out of reach of it all.

He had met many girls in London, who all wore the same kind of hat and talked of the same kind of thing. They all admired the same tepid novels and swashbuckling plays, they all played golf and dressed a good deal, and enjoyed life in a decorous fashion. This girl was radically different. She presented an arresting mixture of sophistication and natural freedom. He could imagine her in an entirely appropriate hat, at Hurlingham or in the Park. He could also imagine her with her sleeves rolled up, peeling potatoes in a backwoods shanty. She seemed extraordinarily competent, and at the same time, strangely young and forlorn.

These complications had deeply entangled Peter's fancy, even if they had left his heart untouched. He thought he would enjoy spending his life in puzzling out Gaenor. The question was, would she submit to the process?

She had shown aversion during most of their acquaintance, until yesterday. He vividly remembered how she had declined to come out with him and suddenly changed her mind. Was that change of mind going to change two destinies, he wondered?

He felt sure that she had loved unwisely, that her family had put a stopper upon her affection and had dragged her away 'to get over it,' as the saying is. If the man whom she had loved was no longer available, this circumstance should help Peter. For the girl who has once loved usually believes that she will not love again, and may therefore wed a man for whom she has no strong feeling. Peter thought this would content him. He might feel uncomfortable with a girl who was in love with him. He wanted a congenial companion, an interesting study. Gaenor Lisle was what he wanted.

Precipitation was a thing he dreaded. But it seemed as if the circumstances now forced precipitation upon him. "She can but refuse me," he thought. The mere fact of his so thinking shows that he cannot have been deeply in love. Yet, on the other hand, some strong fascination must have been at work to cause him to decide upon a course of action so foreign to his usual habits.

It is impossible honestly to probe one's own motives, because the feelings take a hand in the probing and render us blind to calm reason. In Peter's own estimation he had never come to a conclusion more reasonably in his life than when he decided that he ought to ask Gaenor Lisle to be his wife. Afterwards, when he looked back upon that proceeding, it seemed to him as if the rainbow glamour of the Côtes Granit Rose had flung its spell about him and dazzled his judgment.

He duly sent to make enquiries; and learnt, by this means, that Miss Lisle had no fever, that Dr. Rusper

had, nevertheless, kept her in bed for a day, but that she might be downstairs to-morrow, though, of course, she must keep her foot up for some time.

Peter considered. In his view, his offer ought to be made before he confronted her parents. Mr. Lisle had seemed not unprepared to ask him his intentions. Since he had now quite decided what these were, he thought he ought to put them on record — for the girl's sake — to stop any loophole, however small, for scandal.

He felt pretty sure, however, of not being able to see her alone just at present. If she was tied to a sofa, there was sure to be somebody else always in the same room, and even such a proposal as Peter contemplated, can hardly be uttered in the presence of a third person.

He had often determined that nothing should make him *write* his offer of marriage, but here again circumstances seemed to be too strong for him. He sat down at the table in his room, with pens and paper, wondering how he should make the plunge.

“With a girl like that, everything depends upon the manner,” he said to himself. To own the truth, he had never anticipated that he should be found wanting at such a crisis. It was the kind of thing a man ought to do well, or not at all. Why should an Englishman be such an egregious ass when it came to love-making?

Somehow, this was hardly love-making.

His purple-grey eyes were fixed, with rather a far-away look, upon the tumbled, heaped-up clouds which were rolling and wallowing in the windy skies. And as he gazed the sun streamed out between, much as

two days ago it had burst upon them as they lay on the cliff overlooking the angry sea. The memory quickened Peter's breath, and brought him a measure of inspiration.

This is what he wrote:

My dear Miss Lisle,—

I met you — I own it — for the first time on the Ile de l'Abbaye, the day before yesterday. Do you think it possible that such a first time should also be the last? I do not. I find that the friendship must be not merely continued but developed. The alternative would be that I must never see you again.

In plain words, I ask you to be my wife. In all the world there can hardly be a more lonely man than I. If I have the hope of your companionship, the loneliness would disperse, as (if you remember) the gloom dispersed on the Ile de l'Abbaye when the sun darted out so gloriously, as we gazed upon the sea, side by side.

I am living over again all the minutes of our adventure. One of your questions was — "Don't you wish you had never seen me?"

Please take this letter as an answer to that question, to which, at the time, I gave no reply.

There is a sentence in Comte's philosophy which I have taken more or less as the motto of my own.

"Entre deux êtres aussi complexes et aussi divers que l'homme et la femme, ce n'est pas trop de toute la vie, pour se bien connaître et s'aimer dignement."

To say — "Give me your whole future," is to ask much. But if one can add, as I can and do — "I give you mine" — the presumption of the request is, I think, diminished, though perhaps not the daring.

Observe! You and I began, the day before yesterday. The future alone concerns us. Let us make it ours.

Your faithful servant,

PETER GARSTIN.

If the answer to this is 'No,' I shall leave Porz Gwenn tomorrow without seeing you again.

When this missive was entrusted to the buxom Josephine, *femme de chambre* at the Hotel Granit Rose, and she had hurried off down the road with it, Peter was left in the queerest frame of mind. He honestly did not know whether he wished for 'yes' or 'no' from Miss Lisle. He felt that either reply would land him in complications. The negative would snap off short what had been an interesting friendship. The 'yes' would involve him in all sorts of new beginnings and untried sensations. He tried to console himself with the idea that, come what might, he had done his clear duty. But the whole affair was conspicuously unlike the courtship which he had planned for himself from time to time in his own imagination, as young men will.

At least he was sure of one thing, that he could not remain inactive until the reply arrived. He went out, without leaving any message as to where he was going, or how far.

The wind had dropped, the weather seemed as if, ashamed of its late exhibition of temper, it was anxious to atone by a wooing sweetness and gentle radiance. He turned from the sea, wandered up some of the many grassy lanes, and found himself, before long, in the glades of a little wood, full of *Osmunda* fern, growing in profusion. In the heart of the wood was a pool, fern-fringed and half covered with water-lilies. Peter sat down on its brink, smoking, meditating, gazing through the trees at the far dim outline of the Ile de l'Abbaye and recalling his experiences thereon.

He sat there long, never opening the book which was

in his pocket — finding his own thoughts amply enough to occupy him. When at last he returned, only just in time for table d'hôte, Josephine gave him a note.

He had the self-control to put it in his pocket and wait until he had dined before reading it. Then he repaired to his own room, lit a candle, and broke the seal.

The letter was in a rather large, rounded, more or less schoolgirl hand — the hand of one unaccustomed to write much.

Dear Mr. Garstin,—

Your letter would be quite inexplicable, if I could not discern the mistaken generosity which must have inspired it.

The answer would be 'No' were it not for the threat in your postscript. Please let me see you again before you go.

I am blaming myself a good deal, because I did not behave well on the island. I allowed you to see my dislike of the situation too openly. Please forget this. I do not think that my escapade has perceptibly increased the chronic misunderstanding that unfortunately exists between my people and me.

Sincerely yours,

GAENOR LISLE.

CHAPTER IX

CISSIE'S OPINION

"Je lui dirai: Ma blonde
Si ton coeur a changé,
Vais me périr dans l'onde
Quoique sachant nager!"

BRETON SONG.

As a matter of fact, Miss Lisle had not sprained her ankle, she had merely wrenched some of the tendons supporting it. Dr. Rusper made it quite rigid with strapping plaster, and on the fourth day after her adventure, she could limp about.

The English family was in a state of some tension. At first, Mrs. Lisle was inclined to take Gaenor's part against Cissie. As Gaenor most justly urged, she had gone out with Mr. Garstin entirely because her father and mother had reproved her for snubbing him, had said they liked him, thought him a nice fellow, and exhorted her not to be foolish or put on airs.

She went against her own desire, in deference to what she believed her father and mother would wish, and she was delayed by an untoward accident.

It all sounded very well, as Cissie remarked to her husband in private. But there was something behind. What happened on the island? No satisfactory account had been given. She and Fred were certain that

the girl had tried to kill herself, and that Mr. Garstin had prevented it, and did not like to tell tales. What other explanation could be given of the undeniable fact that, since the accident, Peter had pointedly avoided them?

Ronnie had been round to the Granit Rose each day without seeing him. He had been out, by himself, nobody knew where, sending to enquire for the invalid instead of coming in person.

"You can't doubt that Gaenor did something—something, I don't say what, to disgust him," urged Cissie. "I really don't know what you are going to do with her, Mamma. I think I should take Fred's advice and let her emigrate. In the Colonies, somebody would marry her without asking too many questions, and once married, Fred says she would settle down."

"Cissie," said Mrs. Lisle weakly, "I cannot allow you to speak of poor Gae in the way you do. One would think she was a criminal, and had done something wicked, really wicked! Poor child! If her own family turn against her, what is to become of her?"

"Then you don't think attempted suicide is wicked?"

"We don't know that she attempted suicide."

"Well, hasn't she threatened us often enough? You always read something of that kind in accounts of inquests in the papers. The deceased had sometimes threatened suicide, but they thought it was only talk."

"Oh, Cissie!"

"Well, Mother, I am only trying to make you see how difficult the position is. I am quite sure that woman's-rights kind of a creature, Miss Dallas, knew

quite well who we were. I was in a panic all the time lest she should get talking to Mr. Garstin! I am sure I followed those two about as if I had been a detective. Nobody can say that I have not done all I could."

There was a sharp answer upon Mrs. Lisle's gentle tongue, but she did not make it. She might have retorted that the Ruspers were not called Lisle, and if they did not like the association, they could have taken their summer holiday elsewhere. The truth was that Dr. Rusper's practice was not flourishing, and he and his wife would have had to go without a holiday had not her parents come to the rescue. Mrs. Lisle felt it indelicate to remind her daughter of this fact.

At the moment the door opened slowly and Gaenor limped into the room, in a white knitted golf coat and cap. "I am going to hobble down to the beach," she said, "and get a little air."

Cissie had always been jealous of her younger sister, but the reason for her present unkindness was not so much jealousy as the incapacity of a very small mind to help triumphing over someone who is down. "If you go to the beach, you had better beware of the tide," she said sarcastically. "It's rising."

Gaenor's temper and nerves had been worn desperately thin during the last three days. "Cissie," she said, "if ever you are in trouble, I hope I shan't snap and bark at your heels in the way you do at mine."

"Well, I'm sure!" said Cissie. "Snap and bark at your heels! That's a nice way to talk! Can't you take a joke?"

"It's not kind to make jokes out of people's mis-

fortunes," replied Gaenor, hobbling across the room to fetch her book, which lay on a distant table.

"Misfortunes! That is what people all say when there is nobody but themselves to blame," said Cissie tartly. "Misfortune, indeed! — Yes, Mamma, I shall say what I think to Gaenor for once. Here we all are, poked away in this dull hole, afraid of meeting any English people, entirely on her account! My father and mother and brother, with their county position, not daring to show their faces in their usual haunts, because of her behaviour! And she is to have all the consideration, all the sympathy, nobody must say a word to hurt her tender feelings —"

"Cissie, I will not have it," said Mrs. Lisle, making a movement as if to protect her younger daughter, who stood by the table white even to the lips. But Cissie had a grievance to ventilate and was not to be checked.

"She cannot say we have not all stood by her, can she? In spite of conduct which we have settled not to call anything worse than amazingly indiscreet! But she might change her ways now that she has felt and made us feel, the result of such proceedings! And yet the moment a young man comes along, she goes and does the same kind of thing"—Gaenor made an inarticulate sound of indignant protest—"something or other, I don't know what — I was never that kind of girl myself — but something that scares him, or disgusts him, so that he drops us like a hot coal. Can you deny it?" she questioned, turning upon the wretched Miss Lisle.

"Can I deny what?" asked Gaenor, hardly able to speak. She was trembling visibly.

"That Mr. Garstin has dropped us, since your night out with him."

Gaenor moistened her pale lips. "He will not come again unless I give him leave," she said in a low voice.

There was a pause, during which the goaded girl realized her folly in making the admission. She regretted it, but felt too sick and weak to realize what she had done, or what it meant.

Her mother rose and came over to her, putting her arm round her. In uncontrollable agitation, she threw off the caressing touch.

"Gae, do you mean that Mr. Garstin has — that he wishes —"

"I ought not to have spoken," she muttered sullenly; "but how can I stand and bear the taunts, the sneers that are heaped on me by my sister and her husband?"

Cissie was very red in the face. "It is of no use trying to bluff us," she said spitefully. "You want us to understand that you have had an offer, without actually going as far as openly saying that you have. Well, I tell you frankly, I don't believe that Mr. Garstin has offered to marry you."

Gaenor's last rag of patience and dignity failed her. "I have his letter in my pocket," she said distinctly.

"My darling! And you never told me!" reproached her mother.

"No. And I ought not to have told now. One does not do these things. It is dishonourable, a breach

of trust. But I am feeling so ill to-day, and — and Cissie provoked me —”

Mrs. Lisle took out her handkerchief and dashed away a tear or two. “Never mind now, my child! This is the happy ending,” she said tearfully. “I like Mr. Garstin extremely. He is a little sarcastic, I fear, but when I know him better, I feel sure I shall get on with him most pleasantly.”

“There will not be much chance of your knowing him better, Mother.”

“Gae,” broke in her mother, with a kind of precipitation, “you have not refused him already?”

“Practically I have, but not altogether.”

Mrs. Lisle sat still for a moment, holding the girl's limp hand in hers, her face expressing the greatest agitation. At last — “Gae you must give me your word not to dismiss him finally until you have spoken to your father about this,” she murmured in a nervous way.

“Oh, Mother,” cried the girl in distress, “can't you spare me that? Oh, why did I speak? Why was I such a fool as to give away my secret?”

Mrs. Lisle turned to her elder daughter. “Cissie,” she said with decision. “Go and find your father, tell him that I wish to see him, and do not come back yourself. I am displeased at your unkindness to your poor little sister.”

“My poor little sister!” echoed Cissie, with bitter meaning. You could tell that she thought one of the sisters was to be pitied, and that that one was not Gaenor.

She disappeared, and banged the door. When she was gone, Gaenor put out her hands with a curiously expressive movement, clasped them and wrung them together.

"I cannot endure this," she said very low.

"Gae," pleaded her mother, "let us face things. You find it terribly galling to be exposed to Cissie's unkind little speeches —"

"Unkind little speeches!" gasped Gaenor. "Can she be my sister? Can she? I can't believe it. She has lived with Fred until she has grown as mean and petty as he is. But I don't think I ought to be called upon to endure it! When father and Fred met us, the other night, coming back from the island, the very tone of Fred's voice was an insult."

Her mother sighed. "You must not be selfish, Gae," she reminded her. "Remember that it is not you only who have to bear insulting looks and tones. We suffer from them just as much, and perhaps deserve it less. You told us that you would shoulder your share of the bitterness, if we would shoulder ours — that together we would make a brave attempt to live it down. When, at Dieppe, all those English people got wind of our being in the hotel, and came and stared — do you suppose that it was only yourself who suffered, my daughter?"

Gaenor shook her head, gazing hopelessly upon the floor.

"Besides," went on the gentle tones, "it is far easier for you to put a stop to such unenviable notoriety than for us. We must continue to be called Lisle, because

to change our name would be to admit that we have something to be ashamed of, and we do not admit that. But you, Gae — you can cease to be Miss Lisle if so you wish."

Again the girl forlornly shook her head.

"But, yes, you can. Here is a good man, a gentleman, a charming fellow —"

"Mother, he only asked me because he thought he had got me into a scrape, and ought to help me out."

"Do you like him, Gae?"

"I don't *dislike* him."

"Then marry him, child, and resolve firmly in your own mind to put the past behind you, and do your duty."

Gaenor hesitated. "Mother, something in his letter makes me hope that he does know."

"Indeed? He certainly did not at first. Could that Miss Dallas have told him?"

"I don't know. I could have declared, on the island, that he did not know. But in his letter he says, *let us forget the past and make the future ours.*"

"Surely, darling, that exonerates you completely —"

"I feel I ought to be clear on the point — I ought to tell him."

"I am sure that you ought not, for two good, strong reasons. The first is that, however much he might be shocked and distressed by what you told him, he might not feel justified in withdrawing on such a score. This would leave both him and you in an awkward predicament. It would be infinitely disturbing. But it would

hardly be a sufficient ground for a rupture. Yet he would never be able to forget it; it would stand between you. Whereas, if you remain silent, it is a thousand chances to one against his ever hearing anything more about it, since you will no longer be Miss Lisle and nothing dies more quickly and more completely than these nine days' wonders. The second reason why I feel sure that you must not tell him, is on account of your family. It seems to me that your father and I have a right to demand this from you, Gaenor. For our sakes, you ought to be guided by us."

"Then I must just refuse him point-blank, and let him go."

"No, Gae. It is a question of duty. If you do not dislike him, you ought to marry him. It seems to me that his coming here, and his being, by so curious an accident, ignorant of all this wretched business, is an answer to my prayers for your happiness, my poor child. You know how truly I believe, and have all along believed, in your innocence. Did I not firmly believe it, I would not suggest your marrying at all. Oh, my child, do think! You have in all probability a long life before you! You have once burnt your fingers, you have had a terrible lesson. You know now that life is not made up of fiery vows and protestations, and defiance of conventions, and general lawlessness. Here is a young man of means and of really charming appearance, who is willing to make you his wife. You fancy he is not much in love — well! Neither are you much in love. You will start life together with good health, good tempers, good intentions. You have a far higher

chance of happiness than have those who marry in some delirium of passion. Oh, Gae, my dear one, your father and I have suffered terribly on your account! And we have stood by you, in spite of everything, in spite of all appearances! You owe us something, and the price we demand is your silence! Let your father arrange for you to be married at once, and give me your word to be guided by us in all, until you are this young man's wife!"

She had poured out her words in a hot stream, so eagerly that the girl could not interrupt her. But at last, with a choking cry, Gae fell against her mother's breast. "Oh, no, no! Don't ask it of me, don't!"

Her voice died away in a gasp as a sharp knock came on the door of the room in which they sat.

A waiter threw open the door.

"*M. Garstin désire savoir si Madame est chez elle cet après-midi?*"

Mrs. Lisle commanded her voice. "*Que Monsieur Garstin entre,*" she said firmly. Then, to Gaenor — "At least you would not have to endure the sneers of Fred and Cissie any longer."

CHAPTER X

GAENOR DOES NOT SAY NO

"Gather a shell from the strown beach
And listen at its lips; they sigh
The same desire and mystery
The echo of the whole sea's speech.
And all mankind is thus at heart,
Not anything but what thou art,
And Earth, Sea, Man, are all in each."

D. G. ROSSETTI.

GAENOR's answer to his note delighted Peter. Had either her refusal or her acceptance been definite, he would have felt deep disappointment. The fact that she had replied, and that her reply left both him and her in a state of delicious uncertainty, raised his spirits, and caused him to think her more charming, because more subtle, than he had previously believed her to be.

Peter had never coveted the ingenuous and blushing 'yes' of an artless creature in her teens. He knew that such an one usually is in love with love, and not with a man of flesh and blood.

He liked to be piqued and puzzled — to seek out his way in the labyrinths of a woman's personality. That Gaenor understood the game was a most satisfactory discovery.

He walked into the small private sitting-room which

the Lisle family rented, full of agreeable, though very uncertain, expectation.

Mrs. Lisle rose to receive him. Gaenor sat still in her place. Her face and dress were alike white.

Mrs. Lisle had the presence of mind to greet him kindly and naturally. She had been longing, she said, for some days past, to be able to thank him for his care of Nora the other night. She had sent round Ronnie, laden with thanks and invitations, but he had been so unfortunate as to miss Mr. Garstin. She was anxious to hear the full account of their adventure, but he must not give it in the absence of Mr. Lisle, who would also like to hear it. She would go and let him know that Mr. Garstin was here—no, Nora must not go, she was too lame. She rose, to leave the room.

“Was Miss Lisle going out?” asked Peter, with his eyes fixed upon Gaenor’s downcast face. “I see she has on her hat and coat.”

She looked up then. “I was going to try and get as far as the beach, for some air,” she explained.

“Won’t you accept my arm for that small distance?” he asked, going to where she sat and standing before her. “We could have the pleasure perhaps of seeing Mr. Lisle when we return? It seems a pity to miss the best part of the day.”

“That’s very kind of you,” said Mrs. Lisle pleasantly. “Nora insisted that Ronnie should go out for a sail with his brother-in-law; she would not have him stay at home to look after her.”

“I am proud to supply his place,” said Peter nicely.

Gaenor rose, without looking either at him or her mother, and said simply, "Very well."

"Ought you to walk?" asked Peter doubtfully, as she limped along the passage.

"Oh, yes. Fred has made my heel quite stiff, and I can't do it any harm. It doesn't hurt at all, and it is a relief not to be laid up."

"Let us go to our bathing bay, if you can walk so far," said Peter. "Take my arm, and then, with your stick, I think you can get along all right. Take your own time."

Gaenor actually smiled, as she complied with his instructions. "Thank you, Grandpapa," she said provocatively.

"Even Grandpapa is better than Mr. Garstin," he remarked meditatively.

"Is it? I don't think you know."

"True, this is my first experience of the relationship. As far as I have gone, it seems a pleasant one."

"Many things seem all right, just at first."

"Yes. One accepts a tentative position for a time. But life will be moving on."

"That sounds a safe, if a somewhat trite reflection."

"One begins with friendship —"

"Did we?"

"Well, no, I think we began at the wrong end."

"What, with boredom and disgust?"

"No. With a mutual desire to hide."

That interested her. She raised her eyes to his. Peter made use of his opportunity, and looked right into them. They seemed to him like bits of golden

quartz, in which the light died away into a pool of grey shadow.

"You have been crying," he observed resentfully.

"What wonder that I should try to hide from such a Sherlock Holmes!" she retorted mischievously.

"The things I really see, I don't speak of," replied he profoundly. "The traces of tears were visible, though not obvious. They made me feel guilty. I thought it just dimly possible that you might be unselfish enough to be crying for my disappointment."

"What disappointment?"

"Do you suppose that I could consider the note you sent me as a really satisfactory reply to an offer of marriage?"

"It seemed the only possible reply to that particular offer," she answered, quite in his vein.

Peter shook his head. "That is trying to shift the blame upon me."

They had by now reached the little stone stile which led down to the small bay which faced the Granit Rose. "Let us postpone the discussion," said he, "until I have got you safely down into the nook I have in my mind's eye — shall we?"

"I didn't know there was any discussion to postpone," she laughed: "but have it your own way."

He guided her carefully over the heaped-up rocks and boulders to a sheltered corner, out of sight of the few passers-by. He had a rug over his arm, and, to her amusement, further produced from his pocket a folded air-cushion, which he proceeded to inflate. When she was comfortably established, he laid a pack-

age of bon-bons upon her lap. "It's quite a nice day, isn't it?" he said complacently.

"You really are very restful," was her unexpected answer, as she leaned back her head and closed her eyes.

He was enormously pleased. He saw that she had expected a different attitude — that she found herself understood in a way she had not dared to hope. When she opened her eyes after a pause of several minutes, and looked at him, there was in her manner less strain and more naturalness than at any time in their acquaintance.

"I suppose," she said gently, "we may as well get it over, as you have opened the subject. Thank you very much. You have done all and more than could possibly have been expected of you. But I cannot see why we should not go on being friends."

"That seems to me the most cryptic speech I ever heard. Would you kindly speak more plainly?"

"You understand. I am thanking you for your letter —"

—"And trying to convey to me, without hurting my feelings, that I am a presumptuous ass?"

"No," she smiled, "Don Quixote."

"Well, it's the same thing."

His voice expressed a great deal more mortification than his previous manner had led her to expect.

"Oh, you don't understand," she said as if in apology. "I have been ill — I feel at odds with life, I don't want to be bothered. I like you. I like having you here,

and talking, or being silent as I choose. But if you wanted me to — to —”

—“Yes? Go on! What do you imagine that I want you to do?”

She hesitated, coloured, made a little movement of irritation. “Oh,— *spoon*, I suppose,” she achieved, at last.

“I thought so,” said Peter coolly. “But you’re mistaken. I don’t.”

“You don’t?” She hardly knew whether she felt disappointed or relieved. “Then it *was* — you *did* do it because you thought your code of honour demanded it?”

“Nothing of the kind. I did it because you interest me more than any woman I ever saw. I know it sounded premature. I know I ought to have waited. But I am a bit of a coward. I hate the notion of being all alone, as I now am. The curious part of it is that I have never felt impelled to ask a girl to marry me before. I have queer ideas, I suppose. But I have something more than an idea — a kind of conviction that you and I would get on together. And somehow, you don’t seem in the right *milieu* at present, if I may say so without impertinence.”

Gaenor raised her eyes, seeming as if she would search out his very soul. He was looking away, out to sea, and his enjoyment of the situation was animating his expression with a tinge of something boyish and lovable. Peter was fairly launched upon his pleasure cruise. He had always supposed that Love might safely

be taken on board, but had thought it improbable that he would find a girl to agree with him; girls are desperately romantic. Here was one at last, young, dainty, wonderfully attractive in some secret way that was by no means beauty, but which dominated him completely; and she did not want to spoon! He had achieved his ideal, and he was now determined to go on and succeed. His love should be attuned to the same light, pleasant key as his whole life. Violent, disturbing things should have no place in the light barque which bore his fortunes.

"You think," said the girl slowly, "that you and I would get on well?"

"I am convinced of it. I would try with all my might not to bore you. I would do what I could to make the yoke sit easily. I wouldn't promise"—his quick whimsical smile came here—"to make so light a marriage bond as Godwin and his Mary had; I mean, I don't propose to live in a separate house, and send round after breakfast to know if it suits you that I should lunch with you. But I will try and remember that even my company may pall after a time, and that a woman has a right to her friends, even though married."

After a pause—"That sounds ideal," she remarked inscrutably.

"Civilization has made some advance of late in many things," observed the lover, a little pompously. "Why not in the relations between the sexes? As Meredith says, the average English husband is still

merely a Turk at heart. I promise you that I won't be a Turk."

"You are wonderful," she declared, pondering him.

She surveyed the clean-cut outline of his head, with its smooth crop, which now, owing to there being no barber at Porz Gwenn, began to present a ribbed appearance which was becoming. She studied his rather hard profile, his keen, intelligent eye, the mouth that spoke of a balanced mind and self-control. He turned and surprised her scrutiny. "Well?" he said encouragingly. "Now that you know what I want, would it be possible for you to reconsider it?"

"Will you stay here another week?" asked Gaenor hesitating.

"Certainly, if you are going to."

"Then I won't say No until the end of the week," she conceded, and knew that she was dallying with temptation.

Peter's heart leapt. Of course, however, he must not show it. He took the slim, brown hand that rested upon her knee and kissed it deftly. He was a young man who accomplished such things well. In him they never seemed ridiculous. He carried it off.

"That being settled," he remarked with composure that was perhaps a little too careful, "we had better perhaps take advantage of our present solitude to arrange a programme for to-morrow. I suggest that we all go to the Pardon of Notre Dame de la Clarté, at Perros Guirec. It is to be my treat. I will order Rousselle to drive us to the station, and we must also

have a carriage at the other end. We will lunch at the hotel and go on afterwards to Ploumanac'h to see the rocks, and the little shrine upon the beach."

Gaenor was surprised at his coolness, but it was so much to her taste that she acquiesced in it at once. Except for a slight deepening of colour when he kissed her hand, she gave no more sign than he did of the momentous nature of their late discussion. She said that it would be nice to go to the Pardon, and quite agreed that he was by no means obliged to ask Dr. and Mrs. Rusper to be of the party, as they, with her parents, would fill a carriage, and Ronald could ride his bicycle.

From the Pardon their talk drifted easily to archæology, upon which subject Peter was by no means ignorant. Thence it wandered on to books, and upon finding that she read French with enjoyment, he promised to bring her acquainted with the work of Anatole Le Braz, that Breton of the Bretons, who has made the voice of his land articulate in legends and stories recounted with a simplicity and force that goes down to the bed rock of folk-lore. Gaenor had never heard of this author, and Peter, who had a copy of *Vieilles Histoires du Pays Breton* in his pocket, produced it, and read her some pages of the inimitable *Noël des Chouans*.

This was a wholly new form of intercourse with a young man. Gaenor, whose capacity was good, while her education was defective, was quite carried away by this novel idea of comradeship. Her comments were apt and discriminating. She was ignorant enough

for him to be able to bestow information, and quite clever enough to be a pupil likely to do him credit. Accustomed in her home never to hear a word concerning literature, she, nevertheless, had an instinctive leaning towards what was good. The style of Anatole Lebraz led her captive from the first.

Peter might well congratulate himself. He had opened a window in the soul of an ardent girl. He had given her a fresh light upon the problems of existence. For the next few days it must be his business to demonstrate to her that such a marriage as he proposed would be not merely possible but interesting.

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CHAPTER XI

PARENTAL STRATEGY

"Thou art bound about with stately strength for bands;
What strength shall keep thee from my strengthless hands?
Thou art wise; will wisdom teach thee fear of me?
Thou art great of heart; shall this deliver thee?
What wall so massive, or what tower so high
Shall be thy surety that thou shouldst not die
If that which comes against thee be but I?"

SWINBURNE.

SUCCESSIVE days of fine weather and companionship proved favourable to the growing friendship between Peter and Miss Lisle.

The relationship was kept studiously in the same light key. They spoke jestingly, if they spoke of themselves, or their emotions; they were only serious when they spoke of books or of Brittany.

It was discovered after a day or two that Gaenor could ride her bicycle if somebody gave her a little help uphill, and this enabled them to go out with no more formidable chaperonage than that of Ronald. They made pilgrimage to that one church whose name must not be divulged, which lies far out of the track of railways, and where there is preserved one of the few remaining specimens of the *Ankou* or Death, who used, in former times, to have an altar of his own in

Breton churches, and to be invoked when one desired to bring down a curse upon one's neighbours.

Nobody in this village speaks English, and the Ankou is carefully concealed. The casual tourist will be earnestly informed that he does not exist. But he does, and Peter succeeded in obtaining a sight of him.

They went to that grim fortress where Fontenelle, the seventeenth-century outlaw, used to roast his prisoners in the stone oven, still shown, until the victims promised such a ransom as satisfied him. They also, inspired thereto by the Vieilles Histoires, explored the Chateau of Kergrist, and the long avenue up which Awellik, the phantom horse of the smuggler, Margeot, may still be heard to gallop. This was a different way of seeing Brittany. Cissie's grumbles at the lack of a Casino, and Dr. Rusper's desire for golf, were all forgotten in the fascination of such expeditions. It was a land of mystery, poetry, and unfathomable sadness.

When they reached home after such expeditions, Ronald, questioned privately by his parents, had to own that there had been no love-making. Gaenor persistently affirmed that there was no engagement. As the week ended, the family authorities determined that something must be done.

"She must make up her mind," said Mr. Lisle to his wife. "I shall not say anything to Fred and Cissie about it, but I shall take steps to bring matters to an issue by carrying her off."

Mrs. Lisle demurred. Things were going well. She felt certain that, if left alone, Gaenor would eventually

accept her assiduous if somewhat tepid suitor. But she could not be driven, as her father well knew. Why hurry?

"Why?" said her husband bitterly. "Because we have not a minute to lose. Because rumour is like a bird on the wing. It is in the air, and nobody knows when or where it may settle. Any day a new relay of guests may arrive in the place—they may be English—and the story may come out. As it happens, I have heard to-day from the landlord that a party of English are expected on Wednesday in next week. We must leave, and it is my intention to put into practice the idea I had before we came here—namely, to go to Calcutta and see George." George was his brother, an archdeacon in India. "It will be a nice tour for you, and this is the best time to do it, when we have no home of our own in England. Ronnie can board with Fred and Cissie while we are gone, and we must either take Gae with us, or leave her behind as young Garstin's wife."

The plan, as presented, was not altogether sudden or unexpected to Mrs. Lisle. She was fond of travelling, and would be heartily glad to leave Porz Gwenn, where she was much *ennuyée*; in spite of which she did not wish to return to England yet awhile. It would be a relief—though of this she was not conscious—to escape from her daughter and her daughter's husband; it would be a still greater relief to leave Gaenor well married. It had all along been her husband's intention to make this tour later in the autumn. Now he could say that the French cooking did not suit his gout,

and that various symptoms were warning him to take his doctor's advice and make a sea voyage without delay.

He prepared the ground by complaints of his gout on one or two occasions. But he did this sparingly, because he wished his final decision to be something in the nature of a bomb-shell to Peter and Gae. The moment he chose for his announcement was the late evening. Peter had been dining with them, and they were all sitting in their small private sitting-room, as a heavy shower prevented their going out of doors.

"Well, Nora," he said, more genially than of late he had spoken to his daughter. "You must take your marching orders to-night."

Gaenor was seated at the table between Peter and Ronald, all of them poring over a large map, upon which they were tracing a route for the morrow. She looked up, her clear eyes wide.

"Marching orders?" said she.

"Yes. We leave Porz Gwenn on Monday morning, *en route* for the Mediterranean and Calcutta."

"You are joking," said Gaenor vaguely. Peter, who had been leaning forward, arms folded, now stiffly sat upright.

"Your father cannot endure the French cooking any longer," said Mrs. Lisle softly. "As you know, we had not intended to leave France for another six weeks. But his gout has been very troublesome, and the food is the same, you know, all over the country — they *will* mess up all their vegetables with butter —"

"Calcutta!" cried Cissie, on a high note. "Are you going to see Uncle George?"

"That is the idea," returned her father shortly.

"But what about Ronnie and Gae — Nora?"

"Will you and Fred have Ronnie as a boarder at Hampstead?" asked her mother.

"Ronnie we might — he will be out all day, and won't be any trouble — but Nora," — the tone was definite.

There was a pause, then Mrs. Lisle replied quietly, "Nora must come with us to India."

"Well!" said Mrs. Ruser, "some people have all the luck! This plan seems very sudden," she went on. Her tone expressed great vexation, though one could hardly see why she should be vexed. "What will mother do for clothes?" she asked, as if offering an insurmountable difficulty to a giddy scheme.

"We shall have to go to Paris *en route* for Marseilles," said her father. "I am told that clothes are to be had there."

"Well, I wish Nora joy of the voyage. You know how terribly sea-sick mamma always is," remarked Cissie.

Gaenor managed to speak. "I dare say mamma will get over the sea-sickness in time," she replied.

Peter rose and looked out of the window. "The rain has cleared," he said. "I ought to be going. I suppose we can do our little projected trip to-morrow, Mrs. Lisle, even if you are leaving on Monday?"

"Oh, certainly, if Nora is not too tired," assented Mrs. Lisle.

"I am not tired," assented Gaenor listlessly.

"Very well then, I shall expect you both, at nine

o'clock sharp to-morrow," said Peter, and took his leave.

He walked home bewildered. What was to be done? Gaenor was the absorbing interest of his life, and she was to be swept off — not to London, where he could rejoin her, and pursue the thread of a delightful friendship, but to India, where he could hardly follow!

He must reconsider the whole position.

Since her father's announcement she had neither looked at him nor spoken to him, except a few formal words. Her manner had reassumed that dull listlessness, like a stupor of indifference, which he had noted in her when first they met. It was as though he had taken her hand and helped her up a little way out of her discouragement, and as if suddenly she had let go and had sunk back into her former position.

That must not be allowed.

But the alternative took his breath away. If Gaenor did not go with her parents, but remained behind with him, it must be as his wife. It meant immediate marriage. To that he had hardly a hope of her consenting. It meant that they must be married in France, since he could hardly suggest their returning to England for the wedding, knowing, as he did, that they had no house of their own at present, and were taking advantage of their unsettled condition to make a tour of a length not usually possible to British householders of limited means.

Well, he said to himself, why not? Quite suddenly, as he considered the notion of the speedy union, it dawned upon him that it was exactly the thing he de-

sired. His own deep mourning would, in any case, preclude anything in the nature of a function, and whom would he wish to bid to the wedding, were it to take place in England?

There was Mildred, with whom he was quite out of sympathy, and who would think his marriage upon so short an acquaintance, a rash and ill-considered proceeding. Then there was Gilbert Wyman, his particular friend, a dramatist and, in a secondary sense, a barrister-at-law. He might telegraph to Gilbert to come to Paris and help him to get married. That would be far better than having to go over to London.

Moreover, in Paris, one is at the centre of all things. What better starting-point for a honeymoon, with the whole of Europe before one?

True, he had no home in London to which to take his bride. But it would be easy to find temporary quarters, while they decided where they wished to live. The return to England, which he had dreaded, would no longer be distasteful if he brought his young wife with him.

During many wakeful hours Peter thought things over, and the more he thought the better he liked the prospect, if only Gaenor could be induced to see things in the right light.

The morrow dawned misty and tender upon the isle-gemmed sea.

A heavy dew lay upon the geraniums and fuchsias in the little garden of the Granit Rose. Madame Tissot chattered as she trotted in and out while Josephine poured out his hot coffee. She was tying up a *paquet*

of lunch for him to take with him, and giving him minute directions concerning the best way to go. The Sept Iles lay out in the west, like amethysts set in the deep bosom of the sea. A haze of heat was over all, and the beauty of it was almost painful.

As soon as he had drunk his coffee he went and got out his bicycle and had hardly wheeled it into the road when he saw the two Lisles coming up the hill from the Grand Hotel.

Gaenor wore a white dress and a white, shady hat. Her face was pale and looked strained. There were shadowy circles below her eyes.

He was conscious of an upsurging of self-consciousness within himself, and that his heart was beating hard as she advanced. This must be conquered, or everything would be spoilt.

His manner, when he greeted her, was just as usual. Madame stood at the door and called out her wish for '*une belle course!*' Gaenor made an effort, and smiled faintly in response to the kind wish.

"*Bonne chance, bonne chance, mes enfants!*" cried Madame. "*Et n'oubliez pas ce qu'*j*'vous ai dit! — Attention aux couleurs dans le forêt!*"

"What does she say?" asked Ronnie, as they rode off.

"Says there are vipers in the forest," said Peter. "We must look out."

They talked much as they rode — or rather, Ronnie talked, and the others listened, of their parents' sudden decision to move on.

"I'm not a bit surprised," said Ronnie gloomily.

"I always knew mother would never stand this place for long. It's her doing, quite as much as father's, and Cissie's most of all. They hate a place where there is nothing to do."

"It is not surprising that they should," said Peter. "If we could not get about, we might feel bored, too."

"Well, Cissie has cut off her nose to spite her face," said Ronald maliciously. "She doesn't like the place, but she doesn't want to go home to Hampstead yet a while, and that's what she'll have to do."

"No, Ron," said Gaenor gently, "I heard father tell her she might stay another fortnight if she liked."

"Without us, she won't like, she and Fred are always bored when they are together," observed the young man.

Simultaneously Peter and the girl looked at each other. A strange expression came into her small, speaking face. It was quite unintelligible to Peter.

There was no chance at all for private conversation until they had reached the beautiful wood and eaten their lunch.

The day was very hot, and, though this was one of the shortest expeditions they had done, they were all glad to lie upon the turf, after they had lunched, and rest awhile. It was Peter's habit to read to Gaenor at these times; and Ronald, too, had begun to grow interested in some of the books which Peter habitually carried in his pocket. That day, however, it happened to be Maeterlinck, and Ronnie could not even pretend an interest in this author. He arose, as soon as he thought it polite, and went off to see if he could

get a bathe in the lake which lay stretched out below their feet, half hidden in sedge and brake.

After he was gone, there was a long silence before Peter spoke.

In fact, he kept silence until he felt quite sure that she would not speak first. She lay upon the rich, golden-green moss, like a white nymph. Her stillness, coupled with the fullness of pulsing life in her, struck him like a delicious paradox. Her eyes were bent upon some rushes in her hands which she was plaiting in and out. Her hat was off, and lay upon the ground beside her. She made no effort to flee, she remained passive, yet he had a worrying idea that she was there unwillingly — that she would have fled, could she have chosen. Since the day they had passed upon the isle together, he had lost this sensation — this uncomfortable conviction that she was being nice to him at the bidding of others. To-day it returned upon him with full force, hurting him inwardly, and influencing what he had to say. When at last he spoke, it was uncertainly.

“Fate seems pushing you and me, does she not?” he asked.

Something like relief came into her eyes. Was it a hope that he was going to accept her father’s ruling, and let her go? “The strong will not be pushed by Fate,” she began eagerly. “They will say — We are not ready; if you are in a hurry, Fate, pass on and leave us; we do as we had determined previously —”

She broke off, because the colour flooded Peter’s face, and he looked so cruelly mortified that there was no doubt he was desperately hurt.

"Of course," he said, "I expected you to say that. What I am unprepared for, is the extent to which it hurts me! — . . . There has been no feeling on your side, then? All along, it has been one who loves and one who is merely passive! Well! Circumstance is the touchstone! At least you have made up your mind, and it is not my place to rage against your decision. You would rather say good-bye and leave me, and never meet again, than — than —"

"Well?" she said, after waiting in vain for him to go on. "What is the alternative? There does not seem to me to be one."

"There is," said Peter quite bluntly. "If everything were different — if you cared — we might be married in Paris —"

Gaenor made a smothered sound. She gathered herself together and arose from the ground. She was trembling so that she could hardly stand, but that Peter did not remark, for he was preoccupied with his own mortification.

She was terrified. He had said out squarely the one thing she had thought it impossible that he would say; and the awful thing was that it sounded just as if she had pushed him into saying it, when the exact opposite had been her intention.

"Oh," she stammered, "that is too final — that is mad! Can't you see that we haven't got there yet?"

"Of course I can. But I also see that I — I don't answer for you — but I am on my way there. If I had the arrangement of our courtship, I would neither

marry at once, nor part for ever. But if these are the two courses laid before me, and I must choose one, I unhesitatingly choose marriage." He was sitting up on the grass, his hands joined tightly round his knees, speaking low and eagerly, his eyes raised to where she stood. She turned away that he might not see her face. She made superhuman struggles to hide her emotion, for she knew that he must mistake its cause. It was not the thought of marriage with him which was making her miserable, but the thought of deceiving him. There came to her mind the memory of a promise she had given to her parents over-night. She had thought it a tolerably safe promise. It had depended upon Peter's asking her, straight out, to be married without delay, and she had not thought it likely he would do this.

She was snared.

Peter saw the tumult of her feeling, and the sight gave him profound satisfaction, and brought him back all his own poise. He rose from the ground, and went up to her. He took one of her hands and held it between his own, while he said:

"Come! I am not an ogre, am I? I am your faithful servant. If we marry, you give me a promise. But you can fulfil that promise when you please — as soon as you feel ready. I give you my solemn word that I will not hurry you. The actual ceremony has to come in the wrong place. But what of that? We are not savages, you and I. We are civilized beings, and we have intellects as well as passions, and, I hope, principles as well as intellects. You have not known me long,

and you may not feel able to trust me, but if you do, I don't fancy you will be mistaken."

She was unable to reply. His directness suffocated her. He left her no loophole. She must either consent, or tell him the true reason for her hesitation. Both courses showed themselves before her as impossible. Yet how continue the present fashion of her life?

Her bruised emotions craved a new beginning — a beginning with this sensible, interesting companion, who judged her more justly than would have been possible, had he known her story.

She knew her mother's idea, that the knowledge could be altogether kept from him, to be chimerical. He must know, and she must tell him. His sensitive intuitions would see into the heart of things. What need to distress him now, when she felt an inner conviction that, when she disclosed all, she could make him understand?

Never again, she was persuaded, would she meet another like Peter. How, then, could she let him go?

"Don't you think I deserve an answer?" he demanded, with an urgency which could be felt beneath the playful tones.

He still held her hand, though not too firmly for her to be able to withdraw it. She left it in his hold, and closed her eyes a moment upon the baffling future. The summer breeze came whispering under the beeches: the musical fall of the little *source* which flowed just below where they stood, sang an accompaniment to life. She was quite alone — all her relatives, and Peter, too, ranged upon the other side.

Secretly under all the hesitation, she knew that with Peter lay her only chance. She surrendered. "Are you — are you quite sure you wish — that?" she asked, speaking with difficulty. "Oh, be sure, please be quite, quite sure! . . . Make me sure, too!"

"Then look at me," he told her.

She was trembling like a leaf. No wonder that his triumph mounted.

"In — in a minute," she gasped. "Wait, wait!"

"I shall always wait," he answered steadily.

The kindness of the words impelled a response. She raised her head, opened her eyes, and fixed upon him a look of mute appeal. The gesture, the attitude, the expression, were to the young man's mind alike exquisite. His courtship was delicious — as far out of the common run as he had always hoped it might be. He met the glance with his own. He let his eyes express nothing but the earnest friendship, the gratitude and the solemnity of the occasion.

When the tension of the moment grew too great —

"Well! Are you sure that I am sure?" he asked whimsically.

The fingers of the hand he still held closed about his own.

"I am sure," she said, with a brave attempt to rally, "that you are Don Quixote. But if I yield, it is against my better judgment."

"Oh, better judgment be hanged!" he answered lightly, stepping back mentally with joyful relief into his usual attitude. "Better judgment means all the things you can tabulate and put in lists. What

have they to do with true sympathy and the inner light?"

She sighed softly. "Have it your own way."

"I have," he said, raising the hand he clasped to his lips. He kissed it, as he had done before. Then still holding it, and contemplating it, he turned it over, and spread it open on his own hand, palm uppermost.

"The line of life!" he said. "Our life together! I salute the line of our future!" With that he bent his head and kissed the little, quivering palm, and as he released it, and it fell at her side, she had a sensation as though he had kissed her mouth.

The sound of Donald whistling through the wood, made further talk impossible. He was whistling, "Yip-i-addy!" and ever after the senseless tune suggested to Gaenor Lisle the touch of her lover's lips.

CHAPTER XII

“CRAVEN IS IN PARIS!”

“Hopeless it seems — yet I cannot, though hopeless, determine to leave it.

She goes — therefore I go; she moves,— I move, not to lose her.”

A. H. CLOUGH.

IF we all walked through life reflecting, calculating, and arranging our actions to the best advantage, we should be a different breed of creature. We do not do this. In the lives of all of us there are moments and sensations for which it is impossible to account. We do things that we did not mean to do, we express in words, quite suddenly, something we did not even know that we felt. We call it acting upon impulse. More likely it is the blind movement of the sub-conscious self, that astonishing ego within the ego, who is responsible for many of our actions, and whom the so-called realists leave out of sight. The curious thing is that those among us who are as a rule the most self-contained and clear-sighted sometimes depart, in some unexpected moment, from all the rules they have previously laid down, and do something quite at variance with their theory of life.

Peter Garstin's engagement was an aberration of this kind. From the night he spent on the island with Gaenor Lisle, to the morning of his arrival in Paris, he

thought and acted like a man obeying a power which drove him, or a charm which compelled him.

He was in the case of one who settles in a great hurry to take a house, because the agent has warned him that somebody else is eager to have it — that, until the agreement is actually signed, there is always the chance of its slipping through his fingers. The thought that the thing desired may very likely be lost, merely by a hesitation on one's own part, invests it with a new value. Not until the deed is actually done, not until the agreement is in fact signed, does the question as to the real suitability of the house become urgent.

Peter was by no means sure that the sudden step he was taking would be for his happiness; he was only sure that, had Miss Lisle departed for India, it would have been for his unhappiness.

He therefore took the plunge, and stood committed, and, though he was not yet aware that he had been caught, he had an uneasy notion of having been inconveniently rushed.

From Porz Gwenn to Paris is a far cry. Brittany does all things in her own way. Even her railways have become tinged with her powerful personality and are not — as railways are popularly supposed to be — a sign of modern progress. They only show that she can touch the harshest, most unyielding things, and make them her own. The gentle way in which a little train will quietly emerge from the hedge and trundle slowly across the road, with a long, desolate far-off cry that does not in any way resemble the whistle of an engine — the tiny station, where you find a grave

young Breton matron, her sad face framed in her butterfly *coiffe*, dispensing tickets with a patient calm, — the raised earthen platform which, with a name on a signpost, often furnishes the only visible indication of a railway station — these all help to make you ready to believe that even in the days of Tristram and Iseult there may have been light railways in Brittany, carrying grave and prayerful pilgrims to distant shrines on the day of the Pardon. The Bretons are still pilgrims — every one of them. They still perform their religious duties with the eyes of their mind fixed upon the other world. The coming of steam traction has no more power to change Brittany than the fact that Ernest Renan was born at Tréguier.

Gaenor once remarked, as the lonely cry of the train came to their ears across the rolling hills, that it always sounded to her like the wail of the Celtic genius; a thing which is departing from a changing earth, to which it clings in love and sorrow.

When Peter, on the very day following his betrothal, departed by the little light railway to fulfil his necessary fourteen days residence in Paris, he had an inkling that his love was in part a result of the glamour of a country where the thing called modern progress has no function to perform. The fields of buckwheat were flushing crimson, ready for harvest. The wildernesses of *ajonc* were losing their golden glory of bloom. The wayside Calvaries, the sleepy villages and ancient churches with their perforated spires vanished behind him, with the purple and blue glories of the sea. By night, the spell of the fair, sad land was left behind.

Peter was back in a very different world; but one wherein, as he realized uneasily, he was as comfortably at home as he had been in the wilds. The very sight of the tasteful shops, the gay restaurants, the well-dressed women, seemed to draw his attention with insistence to the fact that he was doing a foolhardy, unconventional thing.

There was, however, no drawing back now.

His first care upon arrival, was to write to his half-sister, Mildred Palmer, to announce his approaching marriage, and to ask if she and her husband would find it possible to attend it. He explained that the immediate departure of Miss Lisle's parents for India made a speedy marriage seem necessary, and that, in view of his own dislike of conventional functions and their deep mourning, the arrangement appeared to him an excellent one. He intended to take his wife to Venice for the honeymoon — probably they would visit other towns of Italy before coming back to England.

Small as was his personal affection for Mrs. Palmer, he yet wished that she might come. He even, in order to secure her presence, offered to defray her own and her husband's expenses for the trip.

To his mortification, she did not even reply to his letter.

His other application — to his one great friend, Gilbert Wyman, to come and support him as best man, — was equally unsuccessful.

This did not much surprise him, as he was pretty sure that Wyman would be on his holidays, probably climbing in the Alps. He wrote a second letter, under

cover to Mrs. Stout, Wyman's laundress, and got back a reply from that lady to the effect that the only address she had was Poste Restante, Lucerne, and that she had duly forwarded his communication.

There was thus the chance that Gilbert might receive the letter any day between this and the date fixed for the wedding, and the bridegroom lived in hope. But he felt lonely and deserted.

The feeling was accentuated by the fact that when, a few days later, he went to meet his fiancée and her family upon their arrival in Paris, he found that Gaenor had grown shy, not more expansive, since their betrothal.

Peter had certain preconceived ideas — as most nice men have — concerning courtship and marriage. He held that, upon engagement, there should ensue a period of growing confidence and intimacy. He admitted that his own engagement was exceptional. He himself had offered the exceptional terms, but there was nevertheless an underlying hope that such generosity must provoke a generous response.

This hope, so far, was quite unfulfilled. Miss Lisle remained an enigma.

Circumstances were, however, to blame for this. Though declining to shop upon a large scale for herself, Gaenor was in constant attendance upon her mother, who was investing in an elaborate outfit for the tropics. Major and Mrs. Lisle were, in fact, planning to shake the dust of Europe from their feet for a longer period than they had confided to their family. For the first time since their children were little, they could

feel independent. They had no house to keep up, their two daughters were disposed of, their son old enough to look after himself. They felt ready to enjoy travel on a scale hitherto impossible.

Meanwhile, Paris was to be taken advantage of to the full. As they were not likely to have much chance of plays and concerts for a long time, they liked now to spend their evenings at the theatre. Mrs. Lisle could not understand a word that was said, but was content to remain in absorbed contemplation of the actress's dresses. Cissie and she took notes during the performance, with a view to their shopping the following day.

Peter's intercourse with his fiancée was thus of a restricted kind, and in the day-time, if he desired to show her the Louvre, Notre Dame, or any other place of interest, the whole family was eager to come too—"because, you see, Peter, we can't understand what these guides say, and you know the right pictures to look at," and so on.

Greater intimacy with the family only served to show up in higher relief the fact that they were quite uncongenial to him. His spirits, during these Paris days, sank steadily lower and lower.

His future father-in-law proved unexpectedly generous. He was prepared to settle three thousand pounds upon his daughter, if Peter would do the same. The bridegroom being cheerfully ready to agree, the settlements were quickly and easily drawn up by the Major's solicitor in London.

He learnt that the Lisles were descended from a cadet

branch of the Ormidale peerage. Socially, his future wife was more than his equal. It was a little disconcerting to find out that Gaenor's father was not Mr. but Major Lisle, of the Marines, retired; though there had not been, so far as he could judge, any intentional concealment of the fact. All he could say was that the gentleman had been addressed as a civilian, and had not corrected those who so addressed him.

The Ruspers were the most crumpled of his rose-leaves. Cissie was in great delight at having been invited by her father to come to Paris and see Gae married. She rushed about, fussily busy, indulging herself for the first time in the purchase of a real Paris frock for the occasion, and suggesting to Gaenor all manner of things which she ought to buy, and which her sister steadily refused.

Gaenor had only one point upon which she was determined. She would be married in white, and wear a veil. Cissie was vexed.

"You *can't* wear a veil and have no bridesmaids! It *must* be a travelling-costume wedding!" she cried, "and only see what lovely things they have in the way of hats —"

"A veil is a symbol," said Gaenor shortly, "and I shall wear one. It has nothing whatever to do with bridesmaids."

"But how ridiculous to go walking up the aisle in a Court train with nobody to follow you!"

"Court train! Of course not. I shall have a white embroidered muslin," said Gaenor.

"Well, you *will* look a fright!" cried Cissie. But

Mrs. Lisle, when appealed to, said that Gaenor was to do just as she liked.

It transpired that Peter, if he had an opinion, was biassed in favour of white. So it was decided.

The bride asked Peter not to give her a bouquet. "What is the use?" she asked. "The lovely blooms will all be left behind to wither." She begged for a little bunch of lilies of the valley, which she wore at her breast.

Peter gave her a diamond ring, and one or two other trinkets, but not many, because the taste of Paris was not his own in the matter of jewellery. His gifts caused her as much embarrassment as pleasure, so far as he could see.

She was in a state of nervous tension, evidently afraid to be natural with him, in case he might presume. It was his part to make her feel safe with him, and with this view he preserved his light and half-bantering attitude, sometimes at a cost that he alone knew. He thought that Mrs. Rusper's determined intimacy caused a part of her sister's shrinking. With both the doctor and his wife, it was 'Peter' here, and 'Peter' there, all day long, and the bridegroom began to count the hours until they should escape together from this bondage.

The ceremony was to be at half-past eleven, and they were to return to the Lisles' hotel for *déjeuner*; then Gaenor would change her frock and they would depart for Basle *en route* for Venice.

The ceremony was fixed for the earliest day the law allowed, owing to Major Lisle's discovery that if his wife and he went off that night by the Marseilles route,

they would just pick up a P. and O. boat, upon which it had been ascertained that they could have berths.

A week sooner or later made no difference to Peter, except for the faint chance that a few days' more delay might have enabled him to capture Wyman. On all other grounds he could but feel that the sooner Gaenor and he were free to leave Paris the better.

The last morning of his loneliness dawned rainy and chill. It was hard to realize that he, hitherto as free as air, would be responsible henceforward for the care of somebody else — a young sensitive woman, whom at present he did not understand. Theoretically, Peter was, as we know, a man of the world. Practically, his ignorance of women was abysmal.

He lay on his back and thought it over, for there was no hurry about rising. He knew that he was taking a leap in the dark, and was not sure whether he liked it or no. But of one thing he *was* sure, and it was this — that, were he marrying a nice, simple little girl whom he knew to be wholeheartedly fond of him, he should not like it at all.

The very element of uncertainty carried with it a fearful joy. He prided himself upon being a judge of character; on his own responsibility had he made his choice. It seemed to him that all his self-respect hung upon the success of his venture, the vindication of his sagacity.

He dressed himself with care, and was looking extremely nice when Ronald came to fetch him, and to make sure that he had the ring and the license and the other accessories.

The Best Man was jerky and nervous in manner, and Peter chaffed him a little, slyly, on his new dignity. Ronald laughed it off, but admitted that he would be glad when it was over. Paris was a hole, especially in September. He had never seen a more average lot than there were in their hotel. What sort were they here? Had Peter talked to any of them? His tone betrayed anxiety.

Peter said he had dined at a table by himself, and had not spoken to anybody. Ronald seemed reassured, became more cheerful, and after a little further chat, said he supposed they ought to be going.

As they emerged upon the gallery, they overlooked the hall, from whence a wide staircase ascended, branching into two and reaching the gallery at either end. An Englishman, half-way up these stairs, was speaking, as they appeared, to a friend in the hall below.

"Well, it's a better route, that's all I can tell you, but it will take you six hours longer," he said, in clear tones, with a touch of arrogance. He was a big man, not young, of a heavy type, but with singularly handsome eyes.

Peter was so absorbed in his own drama that though his eyes rested full upon him, he was not conscious of noticing him, but when, on reaching the hall, he turned to find out why Ronald was lingering, he saw that he had gone back into the room they had just left and closed the door.

Peter supposed that he had left something behind. He went on to the bureau, which was at the back of the hall, under the staircase, to discharge his account and

give orders about his luggage. The Englishman who had spoken, turned to continue on his way upstairs. His friend wheeled round, in act to leave the hotel. Suddenly he paused, came back, and called up to the retreating figure —

“ Ah, by-the-way — Craven! ”

The big man so addressed, who was by now passing along the gallery, leaned over the rail. “ Well, what is it? ”

The other lowered his voice.

“ That decree made absolute yet? ”

Craven’s brow darkened. The question, at such a time, in such a place, obviously annoyed him.

“ Not till November,” he said curtly.

“ November? Ah, yes. You’re here alone, I suppose? ”

“ I am,” snapped the other, turning his back and moving away with an evident intention to put a stop to this interrogation.

Peter had heard both question and answer, though without attaching importance to them.

The man called Craven went into his own room, banged the door and could be heard to lock it. Ronnie then emerged and came slowly downstairs. He looked white and upset.

“ Have you done? ” he asked hurriedly. “ I — I think we ought to be going.”

“ I’m quite ready — only waiting for you,” replied Peter in surprise.

He told the hall porter to call a carriage, and they entered it in silence.

"What has upset you, Ronald?" asked the bridegroom presently, with a view to making conversation.

"Oh, I don't know. Gae's wedding, I suppose. I shall miss her, you see. It'll be pretty average dull at home without her, and I have the pleasing prospect of boarding with Fred and Cissie and hearing their jangles all the dashed winter."

"Well, Gae and I will be back in England in a couple of months, I expect. Perhaps we could make a different arrangement then."

"That's awfully decent of you," said Ronnie, but without perceptible lightening of his gloom. "I should feel no end bucked, if you came to town."

"I don't know what we shall do," said Peter thoughtfully. "It will depend upon what your sister likes."

He lapsed into reverie. Would Gaenor be able to endure his company all day — to the point of choosing a small country home and settling there? Or would she prefer a flat in town, and that he should repair to the Temple each morning, to break the monotony? All these things were yet to be decided, and the fact was of such interest that he gave less attention than at another time he might have done to the derangement of Ronnie's spirits.

The legal business of their union had been transacted at the Embassy the day before. It was to the English Church that they were now bound.

They found the diminutive wedding party — Dr. and Mrs. Rusper and the bride's mother — already in their places. An organist was in attendance, and he was

softly playing Wagner. Ronnie and Peter had apparently been waited for; a look of relief was on Mrs. Lisle's face as they appeared.

Ronald glanced round; the bride had not arrived. He stepped into the seat behind his mother and whispered in her ear,

"Only by the skin of our teeth. *Craven is in Paris. I've seen him.*"

Mrs. Lisle could not control her shuddering start. "Ronnie, Ronnie, are you sure?"

He nodded. "I told you it was madness to come to Paris. One meets everybody."

She struggled for composure. Her face was livid. "Not a word to Gae, to your father, to anybody," she gasped.

Cissie flounced round. "Mother, don't whisper! Here comes Gae."

"Cissie, I'm faint! Have you your salts?"

They were produced, with much rustling of Mrs. Rusper's Parisian toilette. "Is anything wrong?" she loudly whispered, but nobody replied, for at the moment, Ronald darted into position behind Peter, and Major Lisle strode up the church, his daughter on his arm.

Gaenor was very white. Her fair hair and the filmy covering over her face made her look as if carved in alabaster. She raised her eyes once to Peter, as she reached his side, and she must have found a reassuring response, for she lowered her gaze and stood motionless in her place. Her hand, when the time came to place it in his, was burning hot. Her replies were

quite audible. Her voice did not tremble as she took her vows.

The chaplain who united them was a constant reader of the English illustrated halfpenny press. The bride's face haunted him. So did her remarkable name. When he saw it, written in conjunction with her surname in the register, the memory of a recent *cause célèbre* flashed upon him. He looked at Peter in some astonishment.

Mrs. Lisle, for a time, was so overcome that she almost collapsed. When, at the beginning of the service, the challenge was given to any objector to step forth and show cause or just impediment — and when the two were addressed in the solemn words, "I require and charge you both" — she glanced fearfully behind her, expecting to hear an arrogant voice raised to prevent the ceremony from proceeding. For what other purpose, she asked her terrified fancy, could Charles Craven be in Paris in September?

As the service went on, untroubled, she called her own common-sense to her aid. He was passing through — what more likely? He was always going to and fro, between Homburg and London, and why should he wish to prevent Gaenor's marriage? She became sure that her fear was but panic. By slow degrees she regained the comparative composure which Ronnie had so rudely disturbed.

Peter emerged from the vestry with a light in his eye and a new expression of responsibility about his sharp-cut mouth. He was married now, and all self-questioning as to the wisdom of that proceeding must

be at rest, for ever. He put his wife carefully into the carriage which awaited them, and then took his seat at her side.

"You do look sweet," he said, in tones of gay and proud affection. "Well! I have arranged everything as we planned. I've engaged a good motor, and we will just take our luggage to the *Gare*, register it through to Basle, then motor to Versailles, dine there and return in time to board the night train."

"It's a charming idea. I have always wanted to see Versailles," said the bride in a relieved voice. It was really wonderful, how Peter succeeded in relaxing tension. He knew that, at such a moment, one must talk on the surface.

"If only the weather is kind," he said. "It looks like clearing up, I think. How is your foot?"

She laughed, a little confused. "The plaster isn't off yet. Fred put it on fresh last night. He says I may steam it off this day week."

"I'll do it for you," volunteered Peter with eagerness. "I'm very handy. I can button your frocks at the back — I often fastened my mother's, and I believe I could do your hair. I feel sure I could roll Greek curls on my fingers. You'll find me a treasure!"

"I am always discovering new attributes in you," she declared amused.

"When I have been extra good," suggested he coaxingly, "you might for a treat let me take out your hairpins. I want to see you with your hair all showered about your face."

She actually laughed. "Oh, Mr. Garstin!"

"Do try and grow used to my ridiculous name!"

"Peter," she said, slowly and meditatively. "A stone! Yes, you are well named. I believe that you are hard, under that velvet glove."

"You'll soon discover what I am. In a week or two you will have turned me inside out, while I shall still be working away at the first syllable of you!—but here we are, just arriving. Mind you run away and change the moment *déjeûner* is over, we shall only just have time to do things comfortably."

"Very well, I shall remember."

"But I shall be sorry when you take off those things," he added, with his air of half-jesting admiration. "I like this misty whiteness. Weddings don't last long enough, it seems all over in a minute. I could find pleasure in contemplating you, just as you are, for a good many hours yet. There is a good deal to be said for the old Oriental idea of prolonging the wedding festivities for several days. A man has a chance to realize his happiness then —"

They had reached the hotel door, and he was helping her out.

"Don't be absurd," she said. Her tone and manner were shy, but half-pleased. Was she overcoming her reluctance?

There is no doubt that this fact — the fact of her reluctance — had sharpened his desire to conquer. Had she met him half-way, he would in all probability have drawn back. The difficulty was a spur.

They went upstairs to a room where *déjeûner* was laid. The rain had ceased, the sky was clearing, and

a sunbeam entered at the open window and rested on the bride, turning her pale hair to vivid gold and her white draperies to sunlit snow.

"There!" he cried, stepping back with keen appreciation to take a survey. "Isn't there an old saying, 'Happy is the bride the sun shines upon'?"

"Oh, Peter, take care! If you grow superstitious, how can I tell that you won't come, one day, to be sentimental, too?"

Peter was charmed. "The gods defend me from that!" he cried devoutly. "If you see it coming on, I authorize you to take strong measures."

The entrance of the others put a stop to the conversation; which left the bridegroom very desirous of more.

CHAPTER XIII

“LONG LIFE AND HAPPINESS TO MRS. GARSTIN!”

'Tis the sparks' long succession one by one
Shall show you in the end, what fire was crammed
In that mere stone you struck; how could you know,
If it lay ever unproved in your sight,
As now my heart lies?

ROBERT BROWNING.

THE guilty secret shared between Ronald and his mother did not conduce to brighten the wedding repast. Major Lisle, who knew nothing of the scare, was inclined to be jovial. He had got rid of his inconveniently notorious daughter, and what was more, she was marrying a young man not merely financially sound, but apparently all that could be desired in other ways. It had been a stroke of luck, their going to Porz Gwenn. The discipline had been sharp, but the result was well worth every moment of the ennui he had suffered there. His affection for his new son-in-law was so overflowing that he had to keep a severe check upon himself to avoid embracing Peter, French fashion. The Ruspers, inspired by their unexpected peep at Paris, and the prospect of a paying guest all winter, were also in high feather. Peter, knowing that in an hour or two he would be rid of all these uncongenial people, and need never in future submit to more than a few hours of their company at a time, was inclined to

play the happy bridegroom to oblige the management.

But Ronnie, usually the merry one, was nervous and subdued. His mother's colour went and came, she started when spoken to, and Peter was inclined to suppose that she was feeling the approaching parting from her daughter more than he had thought was the case.

He was in consequence very tender of her and thoughtful for her — with something of the filial care he had bestowed invariably upon his own somewhat exacting mother. This kindness of his wrought still more upon the overcharged heart of one who had borne much in the past six months, until she was on the verge of a complete break-down.

The strain in the atmosphere made him glad to glance at his watch, and bid his wife run away and prepare for departure.

"We are not going off till the night train," he said, in explanation. "We want to go straight through to Lucerne, so we are motoring to Versailles this afternoon, and shall dine there."

"Oh!" cried Mrs. Lisle, with a terrified glance at Ronald, "do you think that safe?"

Peter stared blankly. "Safe?" he echoed.

"I mean — are you sure of catching the night train? — Motors break down at times."

"If we lost it, there are hotels in Paris," said he, smiling. "We must take the risk of a break-down, mustn't we?"

"Then you won't want me to see you off?" asked Ronald hesitatingly.

"Oh, no, thanks. Please don't trouble. I am a very old traveller, and I am making every arrangement for my wife's comfort."

Mrs. Lisle and Ronald exchanged glances. Their looks said simply:

"Nothing to be done."

Gaenor speedily reappeared. She was taking her travelling things in a suit-case to change at the Versailles hotel. She still wore her white gown, but had exchanged the veil for a shady, rose-wreathed hat, and wore a becoming motor-wrap. She looked wonderfully attractive as she went up to her mother for the final 'Good-bye.'

Mrs. Lisle put the last touch of constraint upon her over-wrought nerves to avoid distressing the girl, whose own self-control, as she could see, was wearing thin. The Major hurried them over their adieux, thrust some bank-notes into the bride's hand, and bade God bless her. Cissie, not daring to utter any of the pious hopes for a reformed future which were in her mind, was almost silent. They passed out with less commotion than Peter had dared to hope for. The family stood upon the balcony to watch the motor start.

"Well, at least," said Major Lisle slowly, as he turned away into the room, "she is married now. You can't alter that."

"But we shall be punished," said his wife, in strange, harsh tones. "He ought to have been told. He will find out. One can't escape these things — not in England — not in this century." She paused a moment, her hands over her heart, labouring to speak. "You

may tell your father now," she gasped to Ronald. Then, sinking into a chair, she fainted away.

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Paris was gay and glittering after the rain. The vivid blue sky seemed all the bluer for the contrast of rolling white fleecy clouds, the air was growing warmer every moment. When the motor reached Peter's hotel he jumped out, leaving his wife seated, and hurried into the hall to secure the service of a porter. He was not immediately successful, as a large party of Americans had just arrived, and mountainous piles of luggage were being conveyed upstairs.

Gaenor leaned back in the open motor, awaiting his return, and surveying with unseeing eyes the disorderly huddle of traffic which seethed about her.

She was feeling rather like someone who has undergone an operation under a narcotic, and wonders how soon after awakening she will become conscious of pain, or if there is really the blessed chance that she may prove to have been freed from her pain.

A good many passers-by turned their heads to cast an admiring glance at her.

Charles Craven was seated at the window of the smoking-lounge on the first floor. His gaze fell upon her, and he suddenly left off speaking, in the middle of a sentence, and grew red. He stared as if he could not withdraw his eyes.

He had two companions, a man and a woman. All three were smoking and drinking coffee and liqueurs.

The lady was evidently English, and very handsome.

She looked about five-and-thirty. Her hair was dark chestnut, with the warm brown eyes which go with such colouring. Her mouth was hard, and she wore to a conspicuous degree that expression of ruthlessness which is typical of the modern society woman. The poor, one's family, one's country, the decalogue, are all nothing when weighed in the balance against the repacious ego of the woman with no duties and no affections — nothing but passions and desires.

For the rest, her manner and appearance were quite well-bred. She had an air of weariness, as though she cared little enough for her pleasures, but woe to him or her who interfered with them!

The man with her was her brother, if the strong family likeness between them were to be trusted. At the precise moment when Craven perceived Gaenor, he had risen and gone to ask the waiter for a time-table.

"What are you lookin' at, Charlie?" asked Mrs. Lyons, leaning back in her chair and eyeing Craven through the smoke.

The man turned upon her a swift glance, the quality of which was so different from those he had been bestowing upon her throughout their short, snatched interview, that she was startled from her pose of indifference.

"I've seen a ghost," he told her, with a hard, bitter edge in his tone. "The ghost of our victim, the poor little Lisle child."

Mrs. Lyons started. "What, little Gae? Here in Paris? Charlie, you're jokin'."

"If you want to contradict me, you have only to glance down at that motor in the street."

She rose, swiftly and softly, screening her long, lithe figure in its sweeping gown, behind the window hangings and looked forth.

"Little Gae, I declare! Well, she doesn't look much like a victim, does she? Just watch! Here's quite a nice man comin' out of the hotel, with his portmanteau and all — is that the brother — Donald — Ronald?"

"Lord, no. That's not her brother. She's off, that's what it is. She's off with somebody. She has gone to the dogs and you and I have sent her there."

"To the dogs? Tut, tut, Charlie. The young man looked the soul of respectability."

"I dare say. We don't wear our vices outside," he replied dryly. "I don't suppose most people could tell that I'm a blackguard merely by looking at me."

Their companion rejoined them. "Time's up, you two," he said. "The chaperon has got to separate you. We must catch the 4:30, and you must remember that even these few minutes are risky."

She rose with a docility he had not expected. "You're right, Horace. People do have a most ghastly trick of turning up. But I don't suppose Barbara has detectives over here. However, it's well to be on the safe side." She held out her hand to Craven. "It's good to have seen you, even for half an hour. Till we meet at Pau, then?"

"I come straight to you," said Craven, "the moment the decree is made absolute."

There was a notable lack of heartiness in his voice.

His eyes seemed to follow the disappearing car down the long, crowded street. Constance Lyons watched him between narrowed lids.

"And don't forget the list of your debts," she said, under her breath. "I'll polish them off, never fear."

This touch of the curb was perhaps injudicious. "You're remarkably good," he thanked her, with a wry mouth.

"I'm nothing of the kind. I hate shelling out . . . for anybody but you. Queer, but true. Well old man — *à tout à l'heure!*"

"I had better not come down to the hall with you?"

"Far better not," said Horace Lindsay. "I'm not doing policeman all this time for Con, to have my pitch queered at the eleventh hour."

"You're right, every time," said Craven dryly. "I ran against a man I know only this morning, and he had the impertinence to enquire when the decree was made absolute."

She paused a moment, her eyes wide with apprehension.

"Who was it?"

"Oh — just nobody. Man called Evans! Wanted to know if I was here alone. By George though, if he had caught sight of the little Lisle, he could send a pretty story home to Barbara, couldn't he?"

Constance made a sound, half amusement, half consternation.

Her brother, having lit his cigar and put on his hat, turned away with determination. "Anyhow, we're

off," he said conclusively; and marched his sister out of the room.

Craven waited where he was until he had seen them drive away. He then hurriedly left the lounge and ran downstairs to the office.

"Can you tell me who the English gentleman was who called in a motor for his luggage a few minutes ago?"

Craven was a well-known guest, and the information was readily given.

"A Mr. Garstin, sir. Been here a fortnight, and married to-day at the English Church."

It was not often that Craven thanked God, but he did so in his heart as he turned away. Notwithstanding this symptom of pious relief, his expression was one of deep gloom. Returning to the lounge he ordered half a bottle of champagne. When it came, he poured out a glassful and contemplated it deeply before drinking.

"Well, here's health and happiness to Mrs. Garstin," he inwardly phrased his toast.

"Hurrah!" said Peter, as he rejoined Gaenor in the motor, a letter in his hand. "Here is a letter from Mildred at last! I could not understand her not replying, nor sending any kind of congratulations! Perhaps this letter will explain the enigma! Ah, I see the postmark is a strange one; probably they have been away for their holiday."

A little sick feeling crept over Gaenor's heart as he

eagerly opened the envelope. Supposing that Mrs. Palmer knew all about everything, and had waited to write to Peter until she had by some means ascertained her suspicions to be well-founded?

Gaenor herself was surprised at the force of her own feeling. She pictured the change in Peter's bright, debonair cheerfulness, the hardening of his eyes as he turned them upon her, should he realise —

Come what might, she must tell him herself, nobody else must do it! She would have snatched at the paper in his hand and said, 'Wait — hear me first!' — but it was too late; he was in the midst of a long letter. She could only sit there, with cold thrills running down her, watching the expression of her husband's face, which was interested, amused, certainly not aghast. As he reached the end of the sheet, and turned to her again, she knew there was no shocking news in what he had read. She told herself that she was a nervous fool, that she saw suspicion in everything, imagined the whole world interested in her concerns, when as a matter of fact, nobody ever thought about her —

She shut her eyes, remembering the torture of the newspaper contents bills — 'SNAP-SHOT OF MISS GAENOR LISLE TAKEN IN COURT' — 'MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE NOTORIOUS MISS LISLE.' 'ACCOUNTS OF GAENOR LISLE'S CHILDHOOD. EARLY PROFICIENCY IN THE SADDLE.'

"Here's the whole thing explained," said Peter in a grateful way. "Minshull — that's Mildred's husband — has got a new living, better value, and in a far pret-

tier part of the country. Mildred took the two kids away to the sea to get them out of the way while she did the move; and they had to change their lodgings, and some of the letters forwarded seem to have got lost. She writes that she is very pleased to have a new sister, and shall hope to see us in their new home as soon as we get back to England. So that's all right. Good old Minshull! Wonder who gave him a leg up? Such a prosy old stick as he is!"

"Where is their new living?" asked Gaenor, eagerly showing interest in what pleased him.

"Why, it's in a lovely part of the world — fringe of Wales — Otterbeck, near Brancaster, you know."

"Brancaster!" said Gaenor in a stifled voice.

"Yes, do you know that part of the world?"

"I've been there."

"Good! I wonder if you know any of the people round Otterbeck? We might write and ask them to call on the Palmers."

She smiled mechanically, trying to show just the right amount of interest. "I'll think it over."

"Do. I shall quite look forward to taking you down and introducing you. The kids are not bad — a boy and a girl, about seven and eight years old, I suppose."

She managed to take in the sense of what he was saying. In her mind was clamouring the question: "Can I tell him now?"

Oh, no, not now. That was out of the question.

The danger of the letter was over. Let them have Versailles in peace and comfort!

CHAPTER XIV

THE COMING OF THE BEST MAN

"All's over then! Does truth seem bitter
As one at first believes?"

R. BROWNING.

THE sun continued to shine all the way to Versailles, and the Park was looking beautiful, although it was September. The Palace was fascinating to Gaenor, who loved history and historical association. The afternoon floated by ere they realized it, and Peter held on successfully to his rôle of friendship — so successfully that Gaenor really believed that he enjoyed it.

There came to her a blessed sense of rest. Mr. and Mrs. Garstin would challenge comment on no hotel list. Miss Lisle was a creature of the past. But though she had respite, there was, underlying her present ease, the sense that it was but temporary. She felt as might some weary traveller, nestling down into the comfort of a downy bed — knowing that the pursuers are on his track, and believing them shaken off for the time; and, feeling the need of sleep so insistent that he must yield to it for a while.

She and her young husband were together, all her jarring associations left behind. He was gay, prompt, attentive, wholly devoted to her service, yet never for

one instant sentimental. She rested upon the soothing moment.

The Palace explored, they drove to a charming hotel skirting the Park, and here Peter ordered dinner while his wife went upstairs to change.

His orders given, he strolled into the smoking-room and sat down to study time-tables. His mind was full of pleasurable anticipation. Venice was new to Gaenor. He was to have the delight of making the introduction. He leaned back with eyes half-shut, seeing through the smoke of his cigarette, the gliding of a gondola, tentated by himself and her.

The swing door was pushed open — a waiter looked in. “*Y-a-t’il ici un Monsieur Anglais, nom de Gars-tin?*”

Peter started erect.

“*Bon! Un Monsieur désire vous parler —*”

He broke off, and stood aside as the tall, lean form of Gilbert Wyman came quickly in, and crossed the intervening space.

“Run to earth, I declare! And only second shot!” he cried, out of breath. “I say though, what an awful thing to do — to hunt a man down on his wedding-day — what? Give you my word I won’t keep you — I’ll vanish, I’ll evaporate — but I just got to Paris too late to catch you and when they said you were dining at Versailles I felt as if I must see you for five minutes, just to wish you luck!”

“Good man!” said Peter, his face lit up with unmistakable gladness, “I’m no end pleased. You must dine with us, and drink Madame’s health.”

"Dine? No fear! I'm most kinds of an ass, but not that kind! I only got to Lucerne yesterday, called at the post, found your message, made a bolt for the station, just too late to catch the night train." He fumbled in his pockets. "Bought a humble offering for Madame in the Rue de Rivoli as I dashed through — as for you, you must tell me later what it's to be — Chippendale sideboard —"

"Oh, shut up about that," cut in Peter. "You don't know how glad I am to see you. Fancied my wife might think I hadn't a friend in the world. But here you are and here you must stay. She is changing her dress — we are travelling through to-night, *en route* for Italy. As soon as she is ready, we'll dine together, and you can come back to Paris in our car." He rang, before Wyman could stop him, and gave the order.

"Well, you are a quaint bridegroom, but I always thought you would be," cried his friend, having urged all manner of excuses and being impatiently waved aside by Peter. "What will your wife say?"

"She'll be delighted," said Peter with his most self-complacent smile. "She is modern to her finger-tips. Tell you, Wyman, I've managed things as I always said I should. Nothing commonplace about my marriage."

"I'm literally dying to see her," declared Wyman, sinking down beside his friend on the lounge, and beginning to light up. "Oh, giddy Peter! The moment the shekels rolled in, he went to market and bought him a wife! Of course, she's pretty — what? And her name's Lisle! Poor girl, how glad she must be to

change it! I declare I should suspect the motives of any girl who consented to marry me, if her maiden name was Lisle."

Peter looked astonished. "That joke's beyond me. What do you mean?" he asked.

"Why, doesn't everybody, wherever she goes, want to know if she isn't THE Miss Lisle? The notorious Miss Lisle?"

"Is there a Miss Lisle who is notorious?" asked Peter mystified. "Why is she notorious? I've been in Spain six months, you know, and for two or three of those, I hardly saw the papers." As he spoke, a memory of Miss Dallas crossed his mind causing a twinge of discomfort.

"Oh, but you must have read of the girl who was made a party with the respondent in the Craven divorce case, and who went into the witness-box and fought her case tooth and nail, in face of the most damning evidence? Why, for a week or two this season she was more popular in the illustrated papers than even a negro wrestler! Even the young person who pretended to go over a cliff in a motor to escape her creditors, was never so much in demand. She *was* a girl, if you like!" He paused, as if recalling impressions. "Something awfully French about her. Slender; fair; wore the right clothes, without a stumble. You couldn't exactly say where the fascination came in, but you knew it was there, all right. However," he went on, unconscious of his friend's rigidity, "that's only my rotten joke, you know, about the name. The notorious Miss Lisle had the most weird Christian name you ever heard of—

let's see now, what was it? Not Guinevere, nor Gwendolen — Oh, yes, I have it. *Gaenor!* G, a, e, n, o, r! Did you ever hear such a name as that?"

Peter smiled. How he achieved it is not known, but he did smile, as he stretched out his arm and broke off his ash carefully against the small gilt bar of the ash-tray on the table.

"Did you see anything of the trial?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, I went in several times. A man I know was one of the juniors on Lady Barbara's side."

"What was the verdict?" The voice of Gaenor's husband did not tremble.

"Oh, Lady Barbara got her divorce all right. The evidence was pretty clear."

Peter wondered whether there was any outward sign upon him of what he felt at this moment.

"They lived in some hunting neighbourhood, near Brancaster — Oh, yes, Otterbeck, I think it was. Everybody had been talking, all the winter it seems, about the way the little Lisle had been carrying on with Craven; hunting and golfing and private theatricals and so on. And then — then they passed a night together in a golf-house on the Moor. But I'm hanged if I know why I am chattering about that confounded fetching little monkey. It can't interest you."

. . . One could see how the fancy of the narrator played around the charm of the reprehensible girl. "She cheeked the judge, you know," he added, with a chuckle. "Made old Binns shake with wrath. I was told that she had half a dozen offers of marriage within a few hours of leaving the court."—

—"If you'll allow me," said Peter, quite steadily, rising as he spoke, "I think I'll just run up and let my wife know that you're here."

"That's all right! Mind you tell her I've not come to spoil sport. Say I'll just wish her joy, and clear out!"

"Nothing of the kind," said Peter, mechanically; "back directly."

He left the room without haste, crossed the vestibule, wondering a little at the fact that he could see clearly and walk quietly, and ascended the stairs to Number 20, conscious of hardly any thoughts, only of one idea — *duped!*

He had been tricked into a hasty marriage with a girl of damaged reputation.

The whole thing fitted together. He recalled the family attempt to change their daughter's conspicuous Christian name—their incongruous presence in the most out-of-the-way spot they could find—their device of hurried departure, to bring him to the point.

At this stage in his convulsed thought he reached her door, and knocked.

After all, there was a chance — just a chance — of there being two Gaenor Lises? As he surveyed the history of the past month, he knew that there was none.

"Who is there?" she asked, from within.

"It is I," he answered shortly.

She came and opened. There was an expression, half of confusion, half of reproving surprise upon her face. She had not expected that he would invade her privacy. She was dressed, all but her hat, and stood

ready for her journey in a little grey Parisian suit. He thought he had never seen her look so pretty.

"I am sorry to intrude," he said under his breath, as he closed the door behind him. "I came up to tell you that my friend Wyman is here."

She uttered an exclamation of pleasure and surprise. Peter stood still a moment, gathering force to continue. "He reached Paris just after we left, and pursued us here, to — to wish us joy."

"That is very kind," breathed Gaenor, conscious of something amiss — some deep change in her husband's demeanour, for which the arrival of his friend did not seem to account.

"He tells me that he knows a Miss Gaenor Lisle well by name, and also by sight," went on the young man, slowly. "He says she is a well-known figure to the newspaper reading public of England. Before contradicting him, I come to you, as you can, I hope, explain the similarity of name."

Gaenor stood motionless, the colour dyeing her small incisive face in a red flood. Here was a new Peter. Here was the end of all before it had well begun. The enemy was upon her, and she had made no defence against his coming.

"Peter!" she said appealingly, and she made a couple of steps forward as if she would go to him. Then, meeting his cold eyes like a barrier set between them, she drew back, faced him and spoke the unvarnished truth. "Peter — it's true."

He had expected it, had felt sure that it must be so, but, getting the blow full, as it were, between the eyes,

he mentally staggered. The first impulse was to laugh out long and wildly at his own excellent stage-management of his own affairs. He fought the insane merriment and choked it down.

"I have it," he asked huskily, "from your own lips? I have married the notorious Miss Lisle?"

She gave a gasp as if he had hurt her physically. "I told you — on the island — I said I was Gaenor Lisle."

"You neglected, however, to inform me that you, with a man named Craven, were a party in a divorce case successfully brought by this man's wife. Is that so?"

She drew herself up with what looked like pride and defiance.

"I was."

"Considering," said Peter politely, "the terms on which we stand, you may perhaps not object to one further enquiry. Why has this man not married you?"

As the question passed his lips, an automatic memory of words heard that very day — heard and not heeded — came back to him. "*I say, Craven, that decree made absolute yet?*" . . .

The man, the very man, was now in Paris — had been in Paris, for aught that Peter knew, for the whole fortnight which Gaenor had spent there! He remembered now Ronald Lisle's queer behaviour as they left the hotel that morning. . . .

He had always suspected a previous love affair. He recalled his own fatuous, egotistical belief that he,

Peter Garstin, could make her happy in spite of that!

He leaned his back against the door, while the gulf of black doubt yawned wider and wider at his feet. He heard the answer his wife was making. It seemed to him quite meaningless.

"I marry Colonel Craven! Why, he has a wife already!"

For the first time Peter abandoned his attitude of calm, temperate displeasure, and showed a flash of contempt. "But I understand that the law, with your assistance, has freed him from his late engagements."

The poisoned arrow of his sneer went straight to the mark, but the smitten girl gave no sign of being hit.

"That makes no difference to me," she returned with a gesture that had something superb about it.

Her husband had no immediate reply. He was terribly anxious to avoid a scene—to save appearances, but deeps had been stirred in him which were raging with unexpected violence. Still he held himself in, willing to give her a chance to throw herself at his feet, upon his mercy.

"Do you think you have treated me fairly, Gaenor?" he asked bitterly.

She stood up there, straight before him, fair and young and fronting him stedfastly. "Yes," she said, without hesitation. "I have treated you quite fairly."

"You mean that?" he gasped astounded.

"I mean it most sincerely."

"Then you and I differ too radically, too funda-

mentally, for any power ever to unite us," he returned deliberately.

There was a pause. What more could be said by the accused girl? It was not in Gaenor to burst forth into self-justification, to asseverate before this implacable tribunal, as she had done in vain to a contemptuous judge, a scoffing jury, her innocence and her wrongs. Perjury, they had told her, is one of the inevitable elements of the Divorce Court. Her denial was simply discounted, and, though Craven had sworn her innocence, he had done so as if he did not expect to be believed.

And yet, for all that, the awful idea that Peter would not believe her had never occurred to her. She had been prepared for the fact that the Philistine in him might come uppermost, and that he would dislike her notoriety. She had not been prepared for the unspeakable accusation which she read in his set mouth and relentless eyes.

Her unpreparedness cut the ground from under her feet. She knew not where to begin, and her lacerated pride hurt so acutely as to bereave her of the power to judge rightly or think coherently.

It was on her tongue to plead — to ask him whether he had ever judged her a temptress — whether during the night she and he had passed on the desert island she had given him cause to think . . . but with the impulse came a rush of stinging considerations. He probably thought that the episode of the Ile de l'Abbaye was planned — planned to entrap him into marriage. . . .

Upon which reflection she found herself gazing into an abyss of such horror as she had never foreseen, as she faced the thought of the depths to which his suspicions of her might descend.

He had been deceived — hoodwinked. How was he to know to what extent?

Ah, no! No! This could not be faced. This, as she had foreboded, was the end, before they had well begun.

She turned away sharply to the window, feeling faint. The air of the September evening revived her, and cleared her head a little. When she spoke, it was in a different tone.

“You say that Mr. Wyman has seen me?”

“He was in Court, during a considerable part of your — trial.”

—“And he identifies me with — with Gaenor Lisle?”

“No. He does not. If he had, I suppose he would have held his tongue and left me to go on in my — er — blissful ignorance of my wife’s antecedents. He only knew that I had married a Miss Lisle, and some chaff of his — He remarked that any girl bearing that name must be so anxious to change it as to suggest doubts of her sincerity.”

She took the insult with no outward sign of the seething resentment within.

“He must not see me,” she said, after a moment’s reflection. “I say this to spare you. You must go to him and tell him that I am overdone. I am unwell, I must have rest. Say that you think I ought to be left to myself for a while — that we shall not leave

Versailles to-night, but that it will be a kindness if he will stay and dine with you. Keep him an hour or two. When he has gone"—she turned her sheet-white face to him—"you can reckon with me."

"That may be the best plan," he said irresolutely. "I—my mind will not work yet. If you are unwell, it will seem to him natural that I should be a little off colour myself. . . . It will be a respite."

"Yes," she agreed, "it will be a respite. I—I feel sure that you can be relied upon to keep up appearances."

Feeling suddenly that the situation was intolerable, he faced abruptly round to leave the room.

She spoke his name, half choked.

He turned, in act to go.

"If you had known who I was, you would not have married me?" . . .

He regarded her for a moment, and his lip curled. "I will also ask you one question. *Why was I not told?* I think the one answers the other."

He went out.

CHAPTER XV

THE ROUTE VIA LE HAVRE

"Back from the Breton coast,
Sick of a nameless fear,
Back to the dark sea-line
Looking, thinking of all I have lost."

TENNYSON.

"GOOD-BYE, Peter," said Gaenor, softly, as his step receded along the passage.

One quiver passed over her face, suggestive of tears. It was promptly banished. No reflection must be allowed but such as was needed to ensure swift, decided action.

She turned the key in the lock of the door, sat down by the table, and from her travelling-bag extracted the notes given her that morning by her father. They were English notes — four, for ten pounds each. Her purse contained, besides, thirty or forty francs in French money. She selected one of the notes, packed the rest securely away, and sought her fountain pen, paper and an envelope.

With hardly any pause for thought, she wrote the following letter.

Dear Mr. Garstin,—

I don't feel equal to the rôle of the unmasked adventuress, and I cannot say that I like you in that of the injured husband. I imagine that this morning's ceremony can be annulled on the

ground that material facts were kept from your knowledge. The first step to the accomplishment of this, obviously, is for us to separate. I am, therefore, leaving for London at once, to spare you as much embarrassment as I can.

Of course I am not fool enough to suppose that I can hide from you, if you choose to have me tracked down; but I think you will see that I am doing the only possible thing.

The sole point necessary is that you should be able to communicate with me, when my signature or evidence is required in order to enable you to regain your freedom.

I therefore ask you to send my luggage to the cloak-room at Victoria, and to address any letters you may wish to forward or to write, to the Post Office in Victoria Street, under the name of Mrs. Brown. Having now been, for several hours, free from my ghastly notoriety, I don't feel able to shoulder the burden again, and shall keep my wedding ring as a protection. The rest of the jewellery you have given me I am leaving in charge of the manager at the bureau for you.

I have only one favour to ask, and I ask it earnestly. Do not let my people know what has happened. I could, under no circumstances, return to them; both they and I have borne too much.

Don't be anxious about me. I have money, and I am not a helpless young person in a realistic novel. Above all, don't reproach yourself. I can do all the self-reproach that is necessary.

There is no more to say.

GAENOR.

* * * *

This letter was written rapidly, enclosed and addressed. Ringing the bell, she sent the waiter to get her English note changed at the bureau, to take the package of valuables to the manager, and to say that they were to be given to Monsieur Garstin later, when he left. She herself had to catch a train immediately, and a carriage was to be called at once for her.

Deftly and without any hesitation she completed her

preparations, locked her suit-case, which contained all that was necessary for the night, walked downstairs, stepped into the little Victoria which was waiting, and was driven to the station.

She caught a train to Paris almost immediately, and made the short suburban journey in the dazed condition of one who feels nothing. The main impression on her consciousness was that certain steps had to be taken at once; that all her faculties were needed to take these steps without blundering; that the thinking might come after.

She arrived at the Gare St. Lazare, at about twenty minutes past seven. Enquiring for the next boat-train, she was informed that the train for Le Havre was leaving in twenty minutes' time.

She reflected that Le Havre would do better than Dieppe. If Peter followed her, as was possible, he would be likely to think she would go by Dieppe as the cheaper route; but he would never think of Havre. It was a ten hours' passage and landed her at Southampton, but she was a good sailor, and she would be in London the following morning, which was all that mattered. She took her ticket, second-class, and, having ascertained that there was a restaurant car on the train, decided that it would be best to appease her hunger during the journey rather than to seek the buffet in the short time remaining.

Having found a corner seat and established her things there, she left the train and went along the platform to see if she could buy a novel — something ex-

citing, something into which she might plunge, to prevent her going mad.

She did not find the novel, but she found the excitement. Suddenly she was face to face with Charles Craven.

"Gae!" he said, and stopped short before her, his massive bulk seeming to close the avenue to freedom. Had Gaenor had a moment's warning she would have cut him dead; but she had no warning, and her nerves were so shaken by what she had just come through that she recoiled with a low sound and a shrinking as though she feared him.

"No, no, don't use me like a leper, don't," said he, under his breath. "Gae, I wouldn't hurt a hair of your head, you know I wouldn't! I only want to offer my congratulations — I hear you are married."

She saw that she must play the part of the bride. "Thank you," she managed to say. "Yes, I am married, but you must excuse me now, I have to remind my husband of something —"

—"You won't introduce me?"—

—"What, to my husband? You must be mad! I have married a gentleman."

"Jove, Gae, you haven't altered much," said the man wincing. He stood regarding her with the intent amused admiration which she had been wont to find so stimulating. Now it made her long to strike him, full in his handsome, insolent face. There was something in his eyes, however, besides admiration — something like a tragic regret. He had aged since she

last saw him — had altered for the worse. There was the subtle degradation that comes to a man upon whom his former set look askance. This man had broken the unwritten law. He had played the game with a young girl who did not know the rules. Lax people, who were quite tolerant of divorce in most cases, drew the line here.

Fear drove Gaenor's feet along the platform. At all costs she must shake off this man — he detained her a moment with a bomb.

"You might wish me luck, before you go. I'm going to be married myself."

"You!" said Gaenor, with cold scorn, halting one second, and continuing to flee before the words were well out of her mouth — "You're married already!" Breaking from him, she wheeled back, entered the train by the door close to which she was standing, and hurried along the *couloir* that he might not see where she took her place.

Until the train started she endured agonies. She was in a '*Dames seules*' where he could not follow her, even if he found her, nor did she think it very likely that he would be travelling by this train. More probably he was seeing somebody off, or was going to Dieppe; but the uncertainty was full of terror.

She knew that his brother had a place near Bournemouth, which might account for his crossing to Southampton. In any case, she would not venture to the restaurant car, lest he might meet her and make the fatal discovery that she was travelling alone. She had

scarcely tasted food that day. At *déjeuner* she had been too excited to eat, and she left Versailles without dinner. She reached Le Havre cold, hungry, half dead with faintness and despondency.

On board the steamer she paid for first-class accommodation, and having chosen a berth went to the saloon and ate a meal, which did her good, both physically and mentally. She looked warily about her in all directions but did not see Craven, and concluded that he had not been in the train.

Fortunately, she had plenty of travelling-wraps with her, and when she had eaten she went on deck, chose a sheltered spot, in the lee of the slight breeze, found a deck-chair, hired a pillow, and settled herself for the night.

Never, since she was born, had she felt so wide awake. It was as though sleep were a thing alien to nature, unreal, not to be expected. Her mind clamoured for a hearing. "So far you have not thought. Now, you shall, you must think—you must look at what you have done and its consequences—you must consider life, as you have made it." This was bad enough, one would think, but there was worse. Not only her mind, but her heart was crying out in unexpected rebellion. There was a feeling of being dragged—as though some unseen agency were pulling her heart out of her, in a sick, desolate yearning for something—someone. . . . How many ages ago was it since Peter wrote and asked her to be his wife, adding the threat that if she refused he would go away? She had not, even then, had the strength to tell him to go. She

had known that his going would cause her suffering. Now she had left him.

Was that cowardice, or heroism? Truly she had thought of it as the latter. Had she stayed, could she have made good her story to him? Could she, by humbling herself, by employing feminine art, have coaxed him into not minding, into accepting his bad bargain? Could she have convinced him that it was not half as bad as he feared? She might have done it, had she condescended to be, even for an hour or two, the temptress woman. That was, somehow, impossible for her. She knew now that her engagement had been impossible all along.

She could not — simply could not, stoop to clear herself of the charge he had implied. It would have been like immersing herself again in all that Divorce-Court mud from which it seemed her garments could never more be free. In the anguish of her shame, she bowed herself together and wondered she did not die. . . .

Her open, sleepless gaze saw the lights of Le Havre sink away in the night, saw the flashing eyes of the lighthouses open and close with their solemn wink and vanish slowly into the distance and darkness which engulfed them. They tortured her with the memory of the night upon the Ile de l'Abbaye, when together they had watched the white and red glare of the Phare upon the Port Rock, flinging its undaunted ray across rain, and mirk, and raging sea.

Peter and she!

With Peter she had been very safe.

She remembered, irrelevantly, how curly his hair had grown when it began to want cutting. She had always thought of him as a person who would be certain to understand, yet he had fallen badly, hopelessly, at his very first fence.

"Why is it," enquired Gaenor of the universe, "that nobody ever seems to know what a woman is like—the things she will do—the things she won't do? If I had been Lady Barbara Craven, I should have known quite well that Gaenor Lisle wouldn't stoop to the thing she was accused of doing. And now he is going to be married to someone else; to the woman who was with him, whoever she was. Ah! If I only knew her name!"

She had been dimly aware, for some time, that the solitude of the deserted deck was not unbroken. There had been footsteps, pacing to and fro. Now a man sauntered slowly past her, cigar in mouth, hands in pockets. Her heart turned in her side. She held her breath and closed her eyes that she might seem to be sound asleep. He strolled past; she began to revive. He returned, with a deck-chair in his hand. "It's of no use your pretending to be asleep," said his voice, quite near, bringing her eyes open with a flutter. "Your husband evidently doesn't believe in boring you with too much of his company." He was seating himself deliberately.

"The spirit is willing, but *mal de mer* is mighty," replied Gaenor, rising. "I had just made up my mind to go down to him."

"You had just done nothing of the sort. You had

settled yourself to pass the night on deck. Don't be a little donkey, Gae. Give me a few minutes. I could make mischief if I liked, you know."

"You mean, you can lie, if you choose. I am the last person likely to dispute it. I have had experience."

"Oh, come, Gae, this is too bad! This is not what I expected. You are married, and all should be forgotten and forgiven."

"How can I forget, if you will not leave me alone? Keep your distance, if you wish me to forget. You shall not insult me with your company," was the swift retort. 'As she spoke she was collecting her pillow and wraps.

"Sit down, child, can't you see I want to say something?" cried Craven impatiently. "What harm can it do you to exchange half a dozen words with me? Not a soul aboard knows who we are, nor anything about us —"

"I know enough about you not to wish to converse," said Gaenor promptly, turning away. He made an exclamation of wrath and impatience. "Take care, when next you say your prayers," he sneered.

"When I say my prayers —"

"You don't forgive them that trespass against you. How can you expect to be forgiven?"

The words arrested her. She had not perhaps known, until she saw him, how fiercely her resentment burned against Craven. Was it for this that she was being punished? Would she never be able to make

Peter understand, until she had subdued her own glowing indignation?

"I have tried to forgive you," she replied with slow reluctance. "I don't wish you harm. I hope you will be happy when you are married to the woman who has allowed my whole future to be wrecked, in order to save her name . . . but I don't think it's likely."

He uttered an exclamation. "You know then?"

"What?"

"Who it is?"

"If I had known — if I had had the least suspicion — I would have used my knowledge," she hurled at him.

"You always were uncompromising," he cried, "but I can't be angry with you! I only want to know one thing — are you happy, child? Is this seasick husband good to you? When I saw you at the St. Lazare, I could have sworn you had been crying."

"One can cry for joy. Good night."

He snatched her wrist. "Answer me."

Her anger flamed. "I will not! How dare you question me, and bully me?" She flung off his touch with vehemence, turned and ran from him.

A curious mixture of exasperation and tenderness, made him mad enough to pursue her. Little spitfire! Her tongue stung him into saying just the wrong thing! But he did want her to know the depth of his regret and shame for what he had done.

Gaenor's foot was still in its stiff casing of strapping plaster, and she did not run as fleetly as was her

wont. Knowing herself followed, she turned quickly in at the head of the staircase which led to the saloon and the adjoining ladies' cabins — caught her heel in the first step and was precipitated down the steep, ladder-like flight from top to bottom.

Her head struck the ground, and she lay unconscious.

A steward, in the act of clearing a bottle and glasses from a table, hastened to the rescue. Craven, with heightened colour, ran down the steps, and helped him lift her upon a red velvet couch.

"Here's a mess!" he ejaculated hurriedly. "Fetch the stewardess — and tell this lady's husband, at once."

The man ran off, and Craven, with shaking hands and heavily beating heart, removed the natty little woollen cap and motor-veil which Gaenor had substituted for her hat for the night. Fortunately there were no pins, but a livid bruise was showing itself with incredible speed upon one side of the forehead. It terminated in a cut, whence a slow trickle of blood ran down the small delicate features.

"Oh, *damn!*" said Craven to himself, as he felt how he trembled, and how his heart was thumping.

The stewardess came. "Better help me carry her to the ladies' cabin, sir —"

"Let that fellow fetch her husband first. He's seasick, I think, poor brute —"

"I fancy the lady's alone, sir," said the steward. "At least, she came on board alone, and took her supper alone."

"Oh, no, her husband's somewhere about, she said so.

Name of Garstin. Go, knock at all the first-class doors until you find him."

The stewardess brought warm water, and washed the cut. Craven sat down heavily and stared at the fainting girl.

If there had only been no Constance in the question! He would not have taken 'no' for an answer, he would have married Gaenor Lisle in the teeth of all the world, in the teeth of debt and difficulty — in the teeth of her own refusal! He would have done anything to have her back as she used to be at the beginning of their light-hearted friendship, with the mischief-spark for ever lurking in her eyes, the dimple coming and going in her cheek, the vivid wit and flashing retort with which she had lit up his dull world and beguiled his bored existence, before he found himself trapped in the diabolical situation which had resulted in their making her their scapegoat.

The steward came back. There was no Mr. Garstin on board.

"He's on deck, I suppose," said Craven thoughtfully. He gently lifted one of Gaenor's hands, pulled off her gauntlet glove, and looked at the wedding ring, sole ornament of the pale fingers.

"You see, she is married," he repeated stupidly. Then, pulling himself together: "I'll help you carry her to the ladies' cabin — more air there than in a private one, and then I'll search the boat till I find the man. I wonder if there's a doctor on board?"

CHAPTER XVI

PETER MAKES DISCOVERIES

“When they struck at length
My honour, ’twas with all their strength. . . .
And doubtlessly, ere they could draw
All points to one, they must have schemed!
That miserable morning saw
Few half so happy as I seemed.”

R. BROWNING.

GILBERT WYMAN did not stay late. He was very sympathetic with Peter over the bride's temporary indisposition. “But there are some girls who simply cannot stand a wedding,” he remarked as one who knew. “If they are emotional, you know, or much in love, the thought of it all is too much for ’em. I knew a man once who married a really charming girl — and her people would insist on a tremendous wedding — a regular raree show — and the result was she went to bed, and he never saw her for a month — and a month was just the whole time the poor beggar had for his honeymoon — not that I think that is a bit likely to happen in your case,” he added hurriedly, feeling his anecdote malapropos in face of the gloom on the bridegroom's countenance.

Peter could not help smiling. “I trust not,” was all he said.

Wyman thought how true it was that each man falls

in love according to his own capacity. Peter was a dear fellow — even a charming fellow for that matter — but a bit superficial. A bride might find him chilling. Wyman had always wondered whether there was an inner Peter, hidden away under that evenness of manner. If there were, it was well concealed. His happiness did not make him the least bit expansive.

He thought it over as he departed to return to Paris in Peter's motor. He imagined to himself a young, impulsive, adorable girl, who had fallen in love with Garstin's *beaux yeux*, and who found him unexpectedly flinty. He was quite sorry for her.

The new-made husband did look somewhat flinty as he went upstairs to seek the woman he had wed that morning.

During the whole of dinner a question had been revolving itself in his mind. What did Gaenor mean by her confession, coupled with her unmodified assertion that she had treated him fairly? He had come to the conclusion that he knew what she meant, and that he himself had digged the pit into which he had fallen. His own certainty that the girl was recovering from an unfortunate love affair, had led him to make the definite suggestion that they should put the past aside, and concern themselves with the future alone.

On these lines she had not treated him unfairly. He had asked no questions — undoubtedly she had told him no lies. So far as he could remember, she had never made any kind of enquiry relating to his own past life. She had accepted him upon those terms — that they should concern themselves with the future alone.

But of course she must have known, all along, that the kind of past she was concealing was something he had never contemplated. Yes, she knew that. She knew many things. As a vision of things she might know crossed his mind, his mouth grew thinner and harder.

Anyhow, they must 'have it out,' clearly and decisively. He must preserve his dignity, his sense of justice. Poor Peter! His pleasure-yacht was in troubled waters.

He knocked upon the door of Number 20. There was no reply. After repeating the knock in vain, he went in, and found the room vacant; not only so, but denuded of all trace of occupancy. There were no bags, no rugs, no hat, no dinner-tray — the whole room was completely in order — so much so that he was sure he had made a mistake, and was in the act of retreating when his eye caught the white envelope lying upon the many-hued table-cover.

He snatched it — read the address, opened it and mastered the contents.

For the first time that he could remember, since a boyhood which, he was told, had been marked by violent gusts of temper, Peter was in a rage.

He was so filled with fury that had there been anything breakable quite near his hand he would have smashed it. Was he not married — lord and arbiter of this girl's destiny? Was it not for Him — Him the master — to determine what was to become of her? If they parted, it must be at his decision; if he said Stay, she should stay.

All this was taken out of his hands. He was left — left alone upon his wedding-day — an object of the ridicule which more than anything he loathed and feared. Sooner than make any defence, his wife had fled.

Surely that meant that she had no defence?

Red-hot pain darted through Peter's brain, his heart seemed swollen to twice its natural size, its hammerings oppressed him, his lips were dry, his eyes saw dimly. He rushed to the window which stood wide, and leaned out into the air like a man suffocating, while he stared unseeing upon the wide Park and the stars appearing in the ambient heavens. It was just dark. . . .

He could not reflect. He sank into a chair near the window, gazing before him at the ruins of his card-castle, the wreck of his yacht, the end of his pleasure-cruise. . . .

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After all, had she been guilty, would she have fled?

He thought not. Having secured him, having succeeded in getting the knot tied — was it conceivable that she herself should start to untie it? The rôle of such a woman towards her bridegroom would have been glaringly different. He would not have been left sitting in an empty room, when such allies in the campaign as youth, tears, beauty and a man in love could all have been summoned to make a bid for victory!

Somehow, thinking of her, he felt that at the bottom of his heart he knew her to be an innocent girl. He recalled her face, that morning in the church — small, pale, resolute — the amber eyes that met his own with

such a devout solemnity that thrills of æsthetic delight had coursed throughout him. She had denied the existence of just impediment, with a brow so pure, a fervour so holy, that she had seemed transfigured. . . .

Why, then, why had she not told him the truth?

He had been entrapped — there was the ugly fact. Whatever else was false or true, he had been surprised into a hasty marriage.

He recalled the chronic lack of harmony between her and the members of her family. If he had been lured, had not she been coerced?

If that were so, was not her decision best? Ought not such a contract to be broken?

His heart cried out No, so clamorously as to surprise him. All in a moment, he saw this wife of his, as Gismond saw the defenceless maiden surrounded by accusers.

Suppose, after all, that he, Peter, was absolutely right — that he alone had truly seen and rightly judged? Was it not his duty to draw sword in her defence, to make her innocence publicly known?

Every nerve in him shrank from the idea. He a Quixote? She had called him so, in the shady *bois*, the day she had reluctantly yielded. It was a rôle for which he had not merely distaste, but contempt.

Anything *outré*, exaggerated, sentimental, was to him detestable.

But when he took his vows that morning, he had accepted the responsibility for her fair name. She was Gaenor Garstin, his wife. He could not feel certain whether he wanted to kill her or to caress her; only he

knew that he thirsted for the sight, sound, touch of her — that all his being was thrown violently out of gear because of her — that he had lost his bearings and was distracted and wild, and several other unwonted things, because the thought of her was a burning flame, which had set his very pulse a-throbbing as with double tides of keenest life.

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To decide what course to steer, with the ocean of existence thus agitated, was not easy. It was, however, imperative.

He would not stay on in this hotel alone. There was still time to get to Paris — time to catch the Calais train and reach London by morning.

It was possible that he might actually catch up with her at the terminus in Paris; at any rate he would try.

Prompt action was the only way to allay the flame of his rage. If Gaenor had appeared on the scene at that moment she would have encountered a Peter who was a complete stranger.

Arrived in Paris, he drove to the Paris-Lyon, secured all the luggage, took it across to the Nord terminus and, after making exhaustive and fruitless enquiries concerning a young lady in grey, he proceeded to Calais, and thence to London.

The thought that the same city once more held him and her, gave him a wholly absurd sensation of consolation.

It was the only consolation he had, for he did not know where to go, or what to do. His own chambers at the Temple were open to him, but he had written

to his laundress telling her that he was on his honeymoon, and he could not face her in his bereft and ridiculous condition.

During the whole journey he was debating the point in his own mind.

Finally he came to a conclusion. He would claim the hospitality of Gilbert Wyman.

The first thing he meant to do was to go into his wife's case thoroughly, and Wyman was the man to help him. That he should know the truth concerning Gaenor's identity was thus unavoidable. Peter knew that Wyman was stopping only a night in Paris, his holiday was over, he would be back in London the following day.

Mr. Garstin was a well-known guest at his friend's rooms, and Mrs. Stout cheerfully made him up a bed.

His first action was to 'cloak' Gaenor's luggage at Victoria, under the name of Mrs. Brown — a humiliation which ignited his wrath anew. He then enclosed the cloak-room ticket in a letter to Mrs. Brown at the Post Office in Victoria Street, a document which he had much ado to make as dignified and temperate as he wished. He reproached her for nothing but her action in leaving him. He put before her earnestly that it was her manifest duty to meet him, and have things out. If her pride insisted on neutral ground, he suggested a private room at Saliani's Restaurant. Would she meet him there at lunch the following day? He enclosed his address and a prepaid telegraph form.

He spent the afternoon at his club, with a file of *The Times*, looking up the proceedings of the Craven

Divorce case. By bed-time he had read it from beginning to end.

It had begun just as his mother's illness entered upon its final and most painful stage — at a time when he had not looked at, or thought about a paper. It had been concluded while the slow coasting boat was carrying him round Spain, through the Straits of Gibraltar, in and out of small ports unknown to the tourist. He had just exactly missed it. He was, it seemed, precisely the one Englishman who had never heard of the Notorious Miss Lisle.

It was a strange whim of fate.

He set himself now to understand the plot of the Drama as, scene after scene, it emerged from the mouth of the various witnesses. His first interest was in the *Dramatis Personæ*. To begin with, there was Colonel Craven, owner of the Grange, Otterbeck — son of an impoverished father.

To him you added the figure of Lady Barbara Craven, his wife. This lady was the daughter of a mushroom Peer, whose money had been made in trade. She was three or four years older than her husband. She was childless. Her health was not good. As the evidence proceeded, you gathered that her temper was not good, either. She held the purse-strings.

These were the two central figures of the picture. Otterbeck? Where had Peter heard, quite lately, of Otterbeck? Why, it was Minshull Palmer's new living — Mildred was there — there now — pitchforked into a perfect hornet's nest of the notoriety of Miss Lisle!

Peter shuddered, as he resumed his reading.

Now the Lises came on the scenes. They took a small furnished house, known as Green Acres, to see if they liked the neighbourhood well enough to settle in it. There was the Major, his wife, and one daughter. A son came down for week-ends.

The daughter, Miss Lisle, was a good golf player. She also rode well, but had no mount. Colonel Craven lent her a hunter. She was out all the winter with the Otter Valley hounds. People began to talk. Lady Barbara remonstrated, and her husband had sworn at her in the presence of a pained butler, who gave evidence. There was no suggestion that the Colonel, though a neglectful husband, had previously given his wife cause for jealousy. "Seemed," said the servant, "as though the young lady bewitched him."

The winter went on. Theatricals were started at Liss Court, the residence of Mrs. Lyons. This lady was a rich and apparently charming widow, whose unmarried brother lived with her. She hunted, and had met Miss Lisle on many occasions, and taken a great fancy to her. Colonel Craven played the hero in these theatricals — middle-aged and impressive — in the Charles Wyndham style; Miss Lisle impersonated the youthful heroine. There was a great deal of rehearsing, and as Liss Court was some distance from Otterbeck, and from Gaenor's home at Green Acres, both Miss Lisle and Colonel Craven were Mrs. Lyons' guests for some days.

Here occurred the first episode — that referred to later by all the papers as the corridor episode. Miss

Lisle was seen by a maid servant at Liss Court, in the small hours, in her dressing-gown, talking to Colonel Craven in the corridor.

Miss Lisle, in her evidence, declared that she had a toothache which kept her awake, and that Mrs. Lyons had told her, if she could not sleep, to come to her room and she would give her some cocaine. Gaenor said that she left her room for this purpose, and as she went, the floating girdle of her gown caught upon the carved projection of a small table on which stood a heavy bronze jar. The table was overturned and the jar fell with a resounding clang. It was full of dried rose-leaves, which were now scattered in all directions. The author of the mischief put down her candle, and stopped to pick them up. The crash had awakened Colonel Craven, and he came out of his room to ask what had happened. She explained, and went back to bed.

In cross-examination she was asked: "Then you did not proceed to Mrs. Lyons' room to obtain the drug you required?"

"No, I did not. The noise I made had startled and confused me. I went back to my own room."

"How long were you and Colonel Craven together?"

"Two minutes, perhaps, or three."

"Are you aware that the maid, who saw you, says she heard no noise of any crash?"

"That is quite possible, if she was at the further end of the gallery. I should think I was several minutes picking up the scattered pot-pourri, and she, according

to what she says, did not come upon the scene until after the Colonel came out of his room."

"Are you aware that she says he was stroking your hand?"

"He felt my hand to find out if I was cold. I was, and shivering."

"The maid says she saw him kiss you."

"That is not true. He did not."

"Did he try to kiss you?"

"Yes. I ran away as quickly as I could."

"He did not follow you?"

"Certainly not."

"Did you not think his conduct objectionable?"

"Most objectionable."

"You complained to Mrs. Lyons next day of the way you had been treated?"

"No, I did not. I ought to have done, but I did not."

"How was that?"

"The theatrical performance was to be in two days' time, and half the county was coming. I knew if I made a fuss it would have been very unpleasant for Mrs. Lyons. Besides, Colonel Craven apologized next day. I thought I could take care of myself."

"Up to that time you had no cause to complain of his conduct?"

"No."

"On your oath, was that the first time he had tried to kiss you?"

"It was, and is, the only time."

"Are you prepared, really, to adhere to that statement?"

"Certainly."

"To swear to it?"

"I am on my oath. Of course I except the stage-kiss in the course of the play. That was stage-business."

"I understand you to say that, except in the course of the play, Colonel Craven has never kissed you?"

"That is so."

Peter pondered this episode. It seemed to him that Gaenor had given her evidence clearly and steadily. She had not been shaken by the cross-examination. It was perfectly possible that all might have happened as she said. There was only one weak place, and it came out in the evidence given by Mrs. Lyons. The defence called her as a witness and she spoke warmly of Gaenor's conduct throughout her stay in the house, roundly declaring that she was positive her young friend was incapable of any such behaviour as suggested; but no definite questions were put to her concerning the corridor episode, and the petitioner's counsel took this up in cross-examination.

"You remember that Miss Lisle complained of toothache during her stay with you?"

The witness hesitated. "She may well have done so without my remembering it now."

"You do not, as a fact, remember it?"

"Since you ask me, I cannot say I do. But remem-

ber, this is June, and you are asking me of what took place in January."

"Do you remember telling her to come to your room for cocaine if she could not sleep?"

"I feel sure that I did, if she says so."

"But you, personally, do not remember it?"

"I do not. My memory is not good. There was nothing to fix it in my mind."

"Do you use cocaine for toothache?"

"My doctor gave me a prescription which contains it. I should be sure to offer it to my guest if she were suffering."

"Would you not be more likely to give her the bottle beforehand, than to tell her to come and fetch it in the middle of the night?"

"I cannot say."

"I put it to you that, had you known Miss Lisle to be really suffering, you would have offered her the remedy over night?"

"Very likely. Miss Lisle has said she was not in severe pain until after she was in bed, when she found she could not sleep, and remembered that I had a remedy. She did not come to ask for it, neither, as far as I can remember, did she mention her inability to sleep next morning. It is a trifling matter, and one soon forgotten. Had I been told next morning of what the maid had seen, it would of course have been fixed in my mind."

"The maid, as you told us in your evidence in chief, said nothing."

"Nothing, until Lady Barbara sent down, three

months later, to hunt up evidence among my servants."

"This maid, Charlotte Anderson, is a servant whom you trust?"

"She is my own personal maid, and has been with me seven years."

"She has told us that she came out of the passage because she heard voices, and doors opening and shutting. She also says that it was not the first night that she had heard such sounds. Did she speak of it to you?"

"Not a word."

"Do you know why not?"

The defending counsel put in a sharp protest. How should the lady know? Mrs. Lyons, however, was courteously ready to explain. "She has told me, since, that she did not wish to trouble me unnecessarily. She watched again, but heard no more, and supposed the meeting she saw to have been accidental, as I have no doubt it was."

"She supposed that, until subsequent facts were brought to her notice?"

"Just so."

All the evidence at this stage of the trial, went to show that Mrs. Lyons' house was in all respects well-conducted—not by any means a house where there were likely to be what the maid, Charlotte Anderson, described as "goings-on."

The lady's position in the county was undoubted. Everyone spoke of her as one whose friendship conferred distinction.

CHAPTER XVII

"THE PAVILION ON THE LINKS"

"Enough that, first to last,
I never touched her lip, nor she my hand
Nor either of us thought a thought, much less
Spoke a word which the Virgin might not hear.
Be such your question, thus I answer it."

R. BROWNING.

AFTER this episode of the corridor, came the episode of the hunting.

Colonel Craven and Miss Lisle, it appeared, got lost together at the end of a long run, and it was past eleven o'clock at night when he brought her home. His tale and hers were in perfect accord. They were misdirected by a countryman, and went far in the wrong direction, and at last, reaching a cottage, decided to rest there while the horses baited. They had some bread and cheese, and the woman made them some tea. This woman, who was called, gave it as her opinion in cross-examination that the lady and gentleman were lovers. Pressed for evidence in support of this theory she replied that she was no fool — she had eyes in her head — she could see the gentleman looking at the young lady as if he could eat her, he was that took up with her. No, she did not see him kiss her, nor embrace her; she did see him unlace her boots that she might warm her feet; and he sat with his elbow on the table, his head

on his hand, “a-glowing up sideways at her.” “The young lady was in high spirits. Seemed as if it pleased her to tantalize him.”

Peter could see Gaenor in the act.

The hunting episode seemed to him quite innocent, except that it was imprudent for girls to have such serious flirtations with married men.

The Petitioner’s side, however, reminded the jury that the man with whom Miss Lisle trusted herself so lightly was the man who had, on her own admission, tried to kiss her at a highly objectionable moment.

Then followed the final act.

Scandalous tongues were busy all about the neighbourhood, regarding the Colonel’s pursuit of the girl. Lady Barbara heard everything.

Her servants testified to her husband’s having turned the key upon her on one occasion when she tried to prevent his going for a ride because he would not assure her he was not going to meet Miss Lisle. He sent a groom indoors with the key when he had started, but by that time the frantic woman had worked herself up into a passion of hysteria, which rendered her ill for some days.

Finally, there was a scene between her and her husband, during which he was heard (by the same pained butler) to tell his wife to “go her own way with her d——d money, and he would go his without it or her.” He was, it appeared, not as a rule ill-tempered, or tyrannical in the house, but the butler deposed to his being “an altered man after Miss Lisle came on the scenes.” His wife, who, in spite of her

jealousy, bad temper and unkindness, seemed to have been attached to him, waited for him outside his room after this quarrel, with the intention, as she declared, of making it up — as he supposed, of forcing him, by threats of cutting off supplies, to give a promise to break altogether with Miss Lisle.

He pushed her from him, and she slipped upon the highly polished oak floor and fell.

Two servants swore that he knocked her down.

According to their evidence, he picked her up, carried her to her room, rang the bell for her maid, and left her without apology.

The servants, some hours later, sent for a doctor on their own responsibility. There was a cut beneath the hair, and it was supposed the poor creature's hair-dye poisoned it. At all events, blood-poisoning set in, and she narrowly escaped erysipelas.

Some days after came the climax.

It was the last day of a golf tournament, and a party of players were upon the links. The day was misty, and made play slow, as balls got lost. By degrees the competitors dropped off, for the golf links were remote, and if the fog thickened, as seemed likely, it was a very difficult place from whence to get home, as after leaving the gate of the links, there were three pathless fields, or rather moors, to cross, before reaching the high road.

The greater enthusiasts, however, held on. The gentlemen sent home the caddies, acting in that capacity themselves for the exciting finish. It was a near thing between Gaenor Lisle and the hitherto Lady Champion,

Mrs. Stanley. The Stanleys lived not more than a mile from the links, and their motor was awaiting them, its huge acetylene lamp forming a beacon and a signal across the wild moor.

The play was over at last, and Gaenor had won. The Stanleys were in a hurry to get home. The umpire and his wife were with them, so they could not offer to take home Miss Lisle. They hastened away, leaving Colonel Craven, who was responsible for the Pavilion, to lock up and follow. Green Acres was so near his own place that it was natural that he should see Miss Lisle home. The Stanleys, who gave evidence with evident reluctance, said that they had no hesitation in leaving Miss Lisle in charge of a man whom they knew to be a married man, and nearly twenty years older than herself. Pressed as to whether they knew of the current rumours, they could not deny that they did. In a country neighbourhood there was always talk. They were, however, sure that there was nothing in it. Colonel Craven was an old friend. They knew him to be a gentleman. He made a pet of Gaenor Lisle, but they were persuaded his affection was quite harmless. Mrs. Stanley drew a reprimand from the judge, by telling the Counsel that round about Otterbeck they were civilised and they were Christians — not the brute-beasts which Divorce Court lawyers seemed to expect.

So far the facts were undoubted. With regard to what happened afterwards, there was, for many hours, only the evidence of the two chiefly concerned.

Their account of what took place tallied exactly.

There was a good fire in the Pavilion, and the kettle was boiling.

It was already pitch dark, and they could not get home much under an hour, even supposing they could find their way without hesitation. They were both hungry and tired. Colonel Craven proposed that they should make tea before starting.

Miss Lisle, who had been on her feet all day, consented without much demur. There were some sandwiches, the remains of the picnic lunch. They made a comfortable meal, and grew thoroughly warm.

Then, as they sat by the genial hearth, Colonel Craven began to grow what Miss Lisle described as "first confidential — then sentimental."

She thought it was time to go, and said so. Her companion was most unwilling, but as she repeatedly urged him, he rose at last, and went into the inner room to fetch a lantern.

Miss Lisle had taken fright at his manner and determined to give him the slip. The moment he left the room she opened the door of the Pavilion very softly, closed it behind her, and hastened away in the mist.

It was very thick, but upon the high ground not impenetrable. Her sense of direction was keen, and she crossed the first field successfully, passing through the gap where the gate had been, and continuing her course with more confidence. She heard the Colonel open the door and call to her, but not loudly, or for very long. She could hear the sound of a motor hooting, and was extremely anxious to reach the road, as she thought some of the golf party must have come back to fetch

them. Between the first and second gateways the ground dipped into a hollow, and when she descended into this the mist became so dense that she could see nothing. Had she been still upon the level of the links, she might have descried the lights of the motor behind the hedges and used their radiance as a guide. Whoever was driving the motor had apparently lost the way, for the hooting went on fretfully for a few minutes as though questing to and fro. Then it ceased, and the sound of the machinery also. Either the motor had stopped, or it had passed out of hearing.

Down in the hollow the vapour was absolutely blinding. She could not see the ground beneath her, and had to walk with hands outstretched. She said frankly afterwards that, could she have descried the lights of the Pavilion window, she would have returned there without hesitation, but she no longer knew where the Pavilion was.

She wandered on, having lost all sense of direction — absolutely alone in a world which seemed to consist exclusively of prickly bushes and to have no firm ground anywhere.

This went on for hours. Every now and then, exhaustion compelled her to rest, but for the most part she struggled along, in order to keep herself from being chilled to the bone. She was thankful for the meal she had eaten, which probably saved her from a severe illness as the result of her exposure. By degrees her lungs became full of fog, and the pain in her chest extreme.

Her account of the night was confused and vague.

She did not know where she went, or what she did. She saw no lights, she reached no road. Her own belief was that she went round in a circle. By degrees the desire to sleep overmastered her. She found herself at last in a hollow place, quite dry, among trees, as she guessed, because there were quantities of red beech-leaves all about. She collected these into a large pile, crept in, leaving only her face exposed, and fell at once into a deep slumber. When she awoke, she did not feel cold, but warm and rested. The mist, though still thick, was certainly less. She sprang up from her nest, shook herself, and after a little groping, found a path among the trees, which led, after many windings, into a lane.

She had no idea where she was, but plodded on, until the long lane brought her out at a cross-road. There was a signpost with a letter-box below it. She could not read the signpost, but its juxtaposition with the pillar-box told her where she was; at least eight miles from home.

She set herself undaunted to trudge these miles, and she arrived at her home at six o'clock in the morning, exhausted, excited, and with a quite incoherent account of her night out, as was elicited from her family under cross-examination. So much for Gaenor.

Colonel Craven's account was, that he started with a lantern in pursuit of the headstrong fugitive, but, finding her out of earshot, and the mist thickening every moment, he had with some difficulty groped his way back to the Pavilion. He, too, had heard the motor on the road, and felt pretty certain that it must have

picked up Miss Lisle. He did not know what to do, but concluded it would be best for him to camp for the night in the Pavilion, both on account of the difficulty of getting home, and also because, if the wanderer should return upon her steps, the light might be a beacon to her.

He therefore passed the night where he was, awakened a little before five, saw that the mist showed signs of dispersing, and started for home.

Upon reaching lower ground, he, however, found that the atmosphere was still thick enough to cause him to take a wrong turning, and he did not actually arrive at Otterbeck until a quarter past six.

This account was given by the Colonel to his wife, upon the first occasion of his seeing her, after the night of the fog. Lady Barbara had the gravest reason to disbelieve it. Her conviction that he was not speaking the truth affected her so deeply that she declined further personal intercourse with him. By the advice of her family she did not, at this time, give him her reasons for knowing that his statement was false. In consequence of her attitude, he addressed to her a written appeal, in which he solemnly reasserted that Miss Lisle left the Golf House early in the evening, and that he passed the night there alone.

When the case came on, Lady Barbara produced witnesses who were able to show the exact value, or lack of value, to be attached to the Colonel's statement.

The pained butler who was so important a witness for the petitioner was, in this connection, associated with the coachman. It appeared that upon the cele-

brated foggy night of the Golf Tournament, Lady Barbara became so anxious when her husband did not return, that, long after midnight, she had her household roused and sent out in search of him with lanterns. The butler and the coachman thought the best thing to do was to walk to the links, if they could find their way there, and ascertain if he were by chance spending the night in the Pavilion.

By the help of their lanterns, being both of them men who knew the country well, they did succeed in reaching the links, which they approached not from the high road, but along a footpath much frequented by golfers in good weather, though sometimes impassable in winter.

Just as they drew near the Golf House, they heard the sound of voices, and, seeing a light within, stood back against the wall of the building. It was still pitch-dark, and they were in dense shadow. They saw the door open and a lady came out. She had a motor-veil wrapped round her head, and was holding it over her mouth. As she emerged, the light within was extinguished, Colonel Craven came out, locked the door behind him and the two, without speaking, hurried off together. The Colonel was carrying a lantern. The weather was still so thick that their figures became almost instantly indistinct and soon vanished.

The butler, horrified by what he had seen, determined to investigate further. Lady Barbara had given him a duplicate key, and with his companion he went inside the Golf House. It was evident that persons had passed the night there. The fire had been raked

out and the chairs ranged in order against the wall, but the embers were hot, and there was a heap of cigar ash in a tray on the mantelshelf, a pile of tea-things which needed washing in the scullery; and under the table a lady's handkerchief, marked G.L. which Miss Lisle, at the trial, had to admit belonged to her.

These men were of course Lady Barbara's servants, and might be biassed witnesses. By a singular coincidence, their testimony as to the veiled lady was corroborated by two wholly independent persons. A keeper and under-keeper of Lord Brancaster, upon whose land the links were situated, were crossing the moor soon after five o'clock on their return from night work. They passed a lady and gentleman, he carrying a lantern, hurrying across the moor in the direction of the high road.

This evidence seemed clear proof that Colonel Craven had been lying. When he went into the witness-box there was intense curiosity as to what he would or could say — how he would try to account for the discrepancy between his own story and that of the four witnesses.

His attempt was felt, even by his best friends, to be deplorably lame. He said that it was true that a lady was with him when he left the Pavilion that morning. He declared on oath that it was not Miss Lisle. He completely declined to give any further information; he was not at liberty to reveal the lady's name.

It is looked upon as an understood thing that any gentlemanly respondent will perjure himself to save the face of a woman. That Colonel Craven was following

the conventional and degrading custom was felt to be fairly certain.

The two were left together, were seen to leave the Pavilion together, at a time which could be sworn to with accuracy. Miss Lisle arrived at Green Acres at precisely the time it would have taken, in the fog, to reach it had she left the links soon after five, and the Colonel entered his own home exactly so much later as would be accounted for by the fact of his having seen her home first.

If the Colonel and the lady were seen by no less than four people on their way from the Golf House to the road, a distance of less than a mile, it seemed a strange thing that Miss Lisle could have wandered all night and reached her home at six in the morning, unseen by any human creature. The girl's account of her proceedings was not impossible, but it sounded extremely improbable, and was not only wholly uncorroborated, but actually contradicted by irresistible evidence.

Nobody could offer any suggestion as to the identity of the mysterious lady who must have arrived, in the night, during a dense fog, at the lonely Golf House.

Lady Barbara obtained a decree nisi.

CHAPTER XVIII

TWO AT THE POST OFFICE

“Well, the result was something of a shade
On the parties thus accused,—how otherwise?
Shade, but with shine as unmistakable.
Each had a prompt defence.”

R. BROWNING.

PETER walked back to the Temple, his pocket-book full of notes, his head full of confusion, his main attention centred upon the hope of a telegram from “Mrs. Brown.”

There was none. He went to bed very late, sure that a letter would arrive by next morning’s post, confirming the appointment he had made.

Late though it was, worn out though he felt, he hardly slept at all.

His mind ceaselessly retraced all the steps of the trial — *his wife’s trial!*

Above all things Peter’s song of thanksgiving had ever been, “God, I thank Thee that I am no Philistine.”

Now he knew that it was not true; he was after all a native of Gath, who cared mightily what was published in the streets of Askelon. Even if, by some unaccountable and cruel sport of fate, Gaenor’s story were absolutely true, yet — *the trial had taken place.*

She, who should have been as stainless and as sheltered as a rose-bud in a garden, had stood before all England, her features profaned in the cheap journals, her secret doings known at every breakfast table, her innocence or guilt a fair subject of discussion in every omnibus and tram-car.

The thought was gall and wormwood to the fastidious Peter. It seemed to him that he could form a pretty clear idea of what had actually taken place on that foggy night upon the golf links.

Gaenor had very likely run away into the mist, as she declared, *but she must have returned*. The man, horrified at her flight, and disarmed by her fears, must have sought and found her, and brought her back, with a convincing promise of good behaviour, which Peter felt fairly sure that he had kept.

They must, however, have decided that, if it were known that they had been in the Pavilion together all night, it would sound too compromising, and they must have agreed upon the story of the all-night wandering.

The more Peter thought and remembered, the more he felt certain that Gaenor was innocent of the capital charge.

But this, in the nature of things, could never be proved. He was the husband of the Notorious Miss Lisle.

When next morning brought no letter, his perturbation increased.

Surely Gaenor must see that, far from constituting any atonement, her unheard-of behaviour was increas-

ing the scandal, and making things harder for him every minute.

He felt thankful that the departure of the Lisles for Marseilles would prevent their expecting any news from the newly married pair until they reached India; but for all that, the situation was almost intolerable.

The hours of that day, until Wyman arrived, were the most awful he had ever spent.

The strain of facing his friend's stupefaction — of making the terrible admission of his wife's identity — at least served to take off his mind from its torment of apprehension.

Wyman's good feeling, and truly English sensitiveness, caused him to be very considerate of Peter. He had never been called upon to face so delicate a situation, but he rose to the occasion valorously.

By the time they had dined, and were sitting together over the fire with their pipes, they had sufficiently overcome their embarrassment to be able to discuss the subject of the trial.

Peter found that Wyman had exactly the same idea as himself concerning what actually took place at the Pavilion.

"You see," said Gilbert, "they didn't of course understand at the time all that would hang upon that night. *They did not know that they had been seen.* Craven was carrying a lantern — which enabled the keepers to recognize him, but had also the effect of dazzling his eyes in the fog, and preventing his seeing anything outside the circle of its light. The two skulking servants, who were spying round the corner,

never said a word, except to their mistress, who swore them to secrecy. She was ill at the time, then she had to collect her relations and take advice — it was weeks later that she began to get up the case, and meanwhile, Craven had solemnly set down in writing the statement that he had passed the night alone.

When he was confronted, in the witness-box, with the evidence for the petition — what was he to do?

Implicitly or explicitly, he must hand Miss Lisle over to the other side. The implicit fashion seemed to him the lesser evil.

But to add to the unreliability of the evidence for the defence, it was shown that both Major and Mrs. Lisle had given out in the neighbourhood that their daughter had come home somewhat late for dinner that night. The Stanleys, who had felt rather remorseful at motoring off and leaving her to go home on foot, called upon Mrs. Lisle next day to find out if she was any the worse for her foggy walk, and were assured that all was well.

When it came to the giving of evidence, however, this story had to be dropped, as one of the servants knew the young lady was out all night, and this witness had been got at by the other side. That made a bad impression.

"I believe," said Wyman, puffing thoughtfully at his pipe, "that I heard every word of Miss Lisle's — your wife's — evidence, and I declare to you that I received the impression that she was speaking the truth. Everyone said it was absurd for her to stick to her story, but they could not shake her. Her evidence

made a profound impression. If the jury had had a loophole, I think they would have taken it. But the thing seemed too plain. And yet — even now, looking back, I am not sure she was not speaking the truth.”—

“— But we know she was not!”

“Not unless there is something else underneath it all — something that has never transpired.”

“How do you mean?”

“Well, nobody actually swore that the lady seen in Craven’s company was Miss Lisle. She was wearing a long, dark motor-coat — so was Miss Lisle, for the Forsyths brought her up to the links that afternoon in their car. She had a motor-veil — any lady in the neighbourhood would have worn one that afternoon. She was about Miss Lisle’s height and size, and by all the doctrines of probability it could not have been anybody else. But it was not proved.”

“If it could have been anyone else — if there were the most slender chance of its being anyone else — would not the defence have seized upon it?”

“Just so. That was what the jury thought.”

“There was not, so far as I observed — and I have gone through the case as a man with life or death staring him in the face — there was not on the part of the defence any suggestion of being able to account for the discrepancy in the evidence.”

“No, none.”

On this state of things, Peter faced another sleepless night, and came next morning to a breakfast-table unadorned by any postal communication for himself.

His anxiety was now very great. At his request

Wyman went round to his chambers, to find out whether by any chance Gaenor had addressed a letter to him there. From this quest Gilbert returned, indeed, with a letter, but not from the truant. It was from Mildred Palmer and marked "*Urgent*. To be forwarded if address known."

Peter knew, before he opened it, what the contents would be. Naturally, before Mildred had been a month in Otterbeck she had heard every detail of a scandal that was still recent. All the Mrs. Grundy in her had arisen and was in terrified protest. Out of all the girls in England — the nice girls, the charming girls — that Peter, her punctilious, refined brother, should have selected the Notorious Miss Lisle!

Much as Mildred regretted it, the position of the new rector at Otterbeck made it quite impossible for them to receive his wife.

Curiously enough, the letter afforded Peter a kind of relief. It was apparent, reading between the lines, that Miss Lisle's notoriety in her own neighbourhood was coupled with a good deal of sympathy. Mildred's letter did not breathe out the fire and slaughter which would certainly have been there had she believed his wife to be guilty of the worst. She did not suggest that she herself, as a virtuous matron, could not meet Gaenor; she even alluded to some possible visit from Minshull and herself when Peter should be settled in town. She only insisted that Mrs. Peter Garstin could not with propriety appear in Otterbeck society. Her first informants had been the Stanleys. Evidently the

Stanleys were kindly disposed to the ci-devant Miss Lisle.

Peter wondered whether he could do any good by journeying down to see them, to find out whether they held any clue to the mystery, or whether they believed the truth to be as he and Wyman supposed.

Meanwhile, Gaenor was madly prejudicing her own case by every moment that she remained separated from her husband.

The only thing that he could do was to ascertain, if he could, whether the luggage had been fetched from Victoria, or the letters from the post office.

He went first to the terminus, and encountered some suspicion from the clerk in charge, but when it was made clear that the enquirer had no desire to handle the goods, but merely to know if they were still there, he was informed that they were. No one had called for them.

He began to suppose that his wife's frank-sounding letter had been planned to mislead him — to keep him quiet until she had time to disappear effectively.

Had he employed detectives at once he could have tracked her down, as she said. Now, what could he do?

How far was he to blame for her action?

He kept on assuring himself that he had done nothing for which he could accuse himself. He had barely reproached his wife, and he still thought that her conduct in marrying him with such a secret untold merited severe condemnation.

But for all his reasoning he could not repress a certain cold, insidious fear of having lost her altogether; a fear which hurt him more acutely than the reading of all the divorce proceedings had done.

He went on to Victoria Street and made his enquiries there. Mrs. Brown had not called for her letters.

Peter felt sure that, sooner or later, she must either call or write for these. In the absence of other clues, he determined to haunt the post office for a day or two, in the hope of seeing her.

He was planning to go down to Otterbeck, or send a detective, to interview the four witnesses and see if any fresh light could be thrown upon the identity of the lady who was with Colonel Craven in the small hours; but his mind was divided and full of unrest. Before setting out upon Gaenor's defence, he wanted to know things which Gaenor alone could tell him. He wanted to have her account, and down in the deep chambers of his being he knew that in spite of all that had come and gone, he should believe what she said.

Two more lacerating days and nights dragged wearily through. Peter was ageing visibly. There were lines about his mouth, a look in his eyes, which were wholly new. He could actually see one or two silver hairs among his thick locks.

It was not until the fifth morning dawned that he began to wonder whether any accident could have befallen his wife, and the thought came with a shock.

She had been wholly confident — full of cool independence. "I have money — I am not the silly heroine of a realistic novel." . . .

But things happen in the traffic, in Paris.

He flew to the post office immediately after breakfast and asked if there were a letter for the name of Garstin. There was none.

His own impotence so weighed upon him that he feared he would lose self-control.

He entered a restaurant on the other side of the street, and sat down to smoke and read a paper, his eyes fixed upon the swing-doors opposite, through which people went ceaselessly out and in.

He neglected his paper, his eyes dwelt upon the stream of comers and goers.

If he saw her approaching, among the others, what should he do? How should he act? He made a picture of her in his mind, as he had seen her last, in her pale grey suit, standing by the table in the room at the Versailles hotel, outlined against a background of the great trees in the Park. There was something about her strangely attractive—something at once innocent and proud. She had the gift most unusual among Englishwomen—the gift of elegance. Her carriage was that of a wild, free thing. . . . Peter knew the turn of her head, the swift undulation of her walk. . . .

He stared at the road, unseeing, his eyes full of his inward thought.

He became aware that a man, whose face was in some obscure fashion familiar, was moving slowly along the far side of the road.

This individual wore a well-cut lounge suit, and there was something military in his carriage. He was a big,

heavy man, just inclining towards stoutness — handsome, in an impassive way. He was looking at each shop on both sides of the way, as he passed.

It sometimes happens that the sight of a face, previously seen, though not marked, brings back an instantaneous mental picture of the place wherein it first appeared. So it was then with Peter. He saw his Paris Hotel, a man going up the stairs —

“I say, Craven, that decree made absolute yet?”

Craven!

Craven here, in Victoria Street, stopping before the busy swing-doors of the post-office — fumbling in his pocket for a paper —

Peter was on his feet, had snatched his hat, had whisked out of the restaurant and crossed the road, long before he had begun to think.

In those few convulsive moments, convictions, suspicions, emotions, seized upon his soul and wrung it.

Craven had been in Paris — Ronald had known it — she had, of course, been in communication with him — and she had gone to him when she escaped from her husband.

Such was the horrible certainty which the mere appearance of Craven in Victoria Street evoked in the being of the young man who precipitated himself across the road among the motor-buses, and then pulling himself together, passed quietly, but shaking with rage, through the swing-doors just behind his quarry.

Craven was standing by the counter, and the usually unamiable, and chronically untidy female clerk behind

the counter was gazing upon him with entire willingness to do his behest, whoever might be kept waiting.

"Have you any letters for the name of Mrs. Brown, Poste Restante? I have her orders to forward them to another address."

"Let me see your authority, please, sir. We have to be so careful."

Craven handed over a note, which the young woman read, standing in her place. Peter was at Craven's elbow, and he could see that the note was in Gaenor's handwriting.

The clerk, without speaking, went to the pigeon-hole, and came back with Peter's three letters in her hand. "The lady says you will kindly re-direct them, sir. You will find a pen and ink over there at the desk."

Craven took the letters, turned away, and crossed the office to the desks. Peter went to the desk next to him, and began to draft an imaginary telegram. What was he to do? His brain was seething, his heart thumping. Should he knock Craven down? His fists trembled to let drive at the impassive, detestable face.

If he did — if he committed a breach of the peace — he might, and probably would, find himself locked up, instead of being at liberty to go and face the woman who had injured him. The address was the thing. Yes — he could see it. When Craven had re-addressed one envelope, he pushed it from him, further up the desk, while he wrote upon the next. Peter could read it without effort.

Mrs. Garstin,
Cecilia Ward,
St. Ursula's Hospital,
Southampton.

Cecilia Ward! A hospital! Then she was ill! Here was confusion piled upon confusion.

He copied down the address mechanically upon his telegraph form. In the few moments which he had for reflection, he could hardly realize things, but he decided thus: "If he posts the letters, I let him go, and hasten to Southampton as fast as I can. If he pockets them, I collar him."

The Colonel gathered up the three envelopes in a grave, pre-occupied manner, and left the post office, closely followed by the amateur detective, who saw him push them into the box for Country and Abroad. Then with a sigh, he turned away, and walked off in the direction of Westminster.

Peter hardly paused a second for reflection. He went straight back to Harcourt Buildings.

It was October, and the first day of term. Wyman was in Court, with a case.

Peter packed his things, looked up a train, and left a note for Wyman to say that he was obliged to leave town unexpectedly, and would let him know his destination later.

Within two hours of his having seen Craven he was in an express train, rushing to Southampton.

CHAPTER XIX

“COLONEL CRAVEN CAME WITH HER”

“Blame I can bear, though not blameworthiness.
But use your sense first! . . .”

R. BROWNING.

To the best of her belief Gaenor lay in her own little room at Green Acres. The window, the fire, the bed, stood in the same relation to one another, the room was the same size, and had the same greyish blue wall-paper.

They had taken down all her pictures, however, which gave it a strange look. She had heard that, when people are very ill, they take down pictures, move furniture, roll up carpets. . . . She knew she had been ill, because a nurse in uniform came and went. When she had time to wonder at all, she wondered whether it had been infectious.

But she felt, as a rule, neither wonder nor surprise. Nothing fretted her. Her family were apparently excluded from the sick-room, and this, far from causing regret, was productive of a deep and pleasing calm and stillness.

There was no need to bother. No doubt her father had duly explained to everybody that she had passed a night exposed to the raw winter fog. They would have

sent word to Colonel Craven that she was too ill to hunt; he would see that Molly Bawn was exercised.

She slept, awoke, and took nourishment, for a period that seemed very long, without a fret or a care.

One morning, however, she opened her eyes with a shock. She was in the grip of fear. Some black, overhanging terror had caught her by the throat. Something menaced her, eyes glared upon her — she stood up before all men, bound to a stake — they were lightning faggots! — Her peace and quiet was all false, then! Why was she lying there in bed alone? Had everybody forsaken her?

The nurse, coming in, found her sitting up, wild-eyed, trembling, crying.

“Nurse, nurse, come here and tell me where I am! Is it all right? Am I awake? This is Green Acres, is it not? Where’s mother? Why have I got this ring on my finger?”

The nurse approached soothingly. “There, my dear, don’t fret, it’ll all come back by degrees,” said she with a certain serene authority which was reassuring. “You’ve had an accident, and it’s muddled your poor head, but don’t you worry. It’ll come back bit by bit. Look! Here’s a wonderful bunch of roses for you! Sniff at these, and don’t put yourself about.”

“An accident!” said Gaenor, catching at the word. “But — but am I married, Nurse?”

The nurse laughed. “Looks like it, doesn’t it?” she said, in her comfortable way, displaying the gorgeous flowers in such a tempting fashion that the patient was constrained to smile, and stretch out her

hands for them. As she stooped her small, porcelain-like face among the blossoms, her attendant thought afresh that she was by far the most attractive patient she had ever nursed. She saw that the process of mental readjustment had begun. The doctor had told her not to hurry it, but to answer questions as far as she was able. The next one was in the nature of a shock.

“Who am I, please?” asked Gaenor, leaning back upon the pillows, the roses in her hands. “Could you tell me my name?”

“Mrs. Garstin, of course,” said the nurse.

There was a deep silence. The girl in bed opened her lips, drew in a deep breath, and colour flooded her from brow to chin. It was as if she blushed all over.

“Mrs. Garstin!” she repeated after a long time.

The nurse was busy placing the bed-table, and setting some chicken broth before her. That done, she began to arrange the roses in vases, with some skill.

The patient spoke never a word, until she had eaten her broth and toast with satisfactory appetite. When she had finished, she hazarded another question.

“Is Mr. Garstin here?”

The nurse shook her head.

“Where is he?”

The woman gave her a keen, kind look. “Perhaps you may be able to remember by-and-by. You have never told us.”

Gaenor gave a little, nervous laugh. “This is very confusing,” she said.

“Oh, never you trouble,” was the unperturbed reply.

"You know it all right, but don't go turning out your memory-cupboards to look for it. Let it come along of itself."

Gaenor's face assumed a stubborn look. "I don't want to remember any more," said she decidedly. "I know all the rest is horrid, and I shall be afraid. The last few days have been so peaceful."

"Well, then, don't you hurry. The only thing is, if you *could* have given me Mr. Garstin's address without bothering your head, we might let him know you are safe. The gentleman who brought you here doesn't know where to write, and we are afraid he must be very anxious."

"What gentleman?" asked Gaenor wonderingly. "No, first tell me where I am."

"In the Cecilia Room, at St. Ursula's Hospital, Southampton."

"*Southampton!* Why, how could I possibly get there? There's nothing in my head about Southampton."

"Oh, come! You were on board the boat from Havre, and you fell down the cabin stairs," prompted the nurse, seeing that she was bothered.

The lightning expressions that played across the girl's face showed that this was illuminating. She turned and flung herself down among her pillows. "Oh, I knew, I knew it would be horrid, if I remembered," she said chokingly, and burst into tears.

It was not until two hours later that she languidly asked who sent the roses.

“Colonel Craven,” she was told,—“the gentleman who brought you here.”

Evidently she thought this over, for some time later she asked if Colonel Craven was still in Southampton.

“He’s staying a few miles out, I think, at his brother’s place,” said the nurse. “He comes over in a motor. He said he would stay till he knew you were going on all right.”

“Do you think they would let me write a note to him?”

The nurse thought they must wait for that until the doctor came.

He looked in that evening, and was well satisfied to find the dormant brain at work again. The patient was evidently now in full possession of the past, but not a word of it crossed her lips. She busied herself writing to Craven, as follows —

I am better. I can remember things now. If you are going to London, please go to the post office in Victoria Street, and ask for any letters for Mrs. Brown addressed there. Post them to me here. I am enclosing a note to tell them to give them to you. I have no scruple in asking a favour of you. You ought to grant it.

GAENOR GARSTIN.

Thank you for the roses.

Charles Craven’s eyes filled as he read the note. He suspected catastrophe in Gaenor’s married life, and foreboded that it might be in connexion with himself. Yet he knew not what to do. He was expected elsewhere, and could not dally longer where he was, while it seemed brutal to leave the girl so ill and quite alone.

.

He dare not see her, for the doctor stringently forbade the introduction of exciting topics. He was glad to leave the place — glad also to do her any service, however small. He said so, in a humble and decorous note, which concluded thus —

If, by any chance, your husband should be wanting details concerning myself which the evidence at the trial could not supply, tell him to come to me and I will give him some confidential information. You would not listen to me — would not let me speak to you, though it was vital that you should hear what I had to say. It is possible your husband may grant what you refused. I shall leave London to-morrow, but expect to be back in a fortnight.

My own Club sent me a letter, after the verdict, politely calling on me to resign. My other club, the Sportsman, is less fastidious, so, if you should want to communicate with me, address there.

I would do anything — literally anything — for you, child. Except forgive Barbara.

C. C.

The cheerful peace which had enfolded Gaenor while memory slept was gone now. She passed a restless night, sometimes in wild sobbing, sometimes in impotent tossings to and fro.

The hours of the morrow wore on heavily. She expected that the forwarded letters might probably reach her by the last post; all day her temperature fluctuated, and her appetite disappeared.

About six o'clock in the evening they came and called the nurse out of the room. She slipped away, laying down the book from which she had been reading aloud, in hopes of soothing her patient's nerves, and ran downstairs.

In the waiting-room was the Matron of St. Ursula's, and a young man of such prepossessing appearance that Nurse Burrow's heart went out to him, there and then, and she took his side, how vehemently soever she had previously in her mind been championing the cause of his wife.

Mr. Garstin rose and bowed as she entered, his eyes, she felt, anxiously demanding — “ How have you been treating her? ”

“ Nurse Burrows,” said Matron, “ this gentleman says that he is Mr. Garstin. He has only just discovered what became of his wife, from whom he had been expecting to hear for days. He wishes to know how Mrs. Garstin came here, and from what she is suffering. I cannot tell him this fully, so have sent for you.”

“ Mrs. Garstin was brought here in a state of coma,” said Nurse Burrows promptly. “ Her friend, Colonel Craven, came with her. He and she travelled together from Paris, I understand, and she fell down the stairs on board the Havre boat and struck her head.”

Peter took it without outward flinching. Inwardly his passions tore him, and raved to get free and do some deadly mischief.

All these awful days in London he had been slowly pardoning Gaenor, though he knew it not. He had been looking upon her more and more as a Pompilia, sacrificed to the wickedness of others.

But this was a knock-down blow.

She had fled from her husband at Versailles, straight to Craven in Paris.

There it was. You could not get over it. He had staked everything on this one girl, and his stake was lost. It remained only to conceal his wound. He thanked the nurse courteously.

"I have been in London awaiting my wife's arrival," he said. "I had all her luggage with me, too. Colonel Craven unfortunately did not know my address and I had no idea they were coming via Southampton — so I have been, as you may understand, in terrible anxiety."

"Dear, dear!" said Matron, "who would believe such a story? In a magazine we should call it improbable that such a thing could happen nowadays, should we not?"

"How is Mrs. Garstin now?" asked Peter, furious with himself because he was so desperately anxious to know.

"Oh, she's much better. She was unconscious for about twelve hours and then came to, gradually, as you may say. But she only got back her memory yesterday."

"Yesterday?"

"Yes, and I'm sorry to say it has upset her completely. She was so happy and contented before, and taking her food well, but since she remembered things, she's been fuming and tossing and won't eat nor sleep. I think she is in a state of mind over some letters she's expecting."

"They're from me," said Peter. "They will come by the last post to-night. But I think she had better not have them. If she knows that I am here and that I know that she is safe, that will quiet her, I expect."

“It ought to,” said Nurse Burrows, so warmly that Peter almost flushed.

“Well,” said the Matron, “I’m afraid we can’t allow you to see her without the doctor’s leave.”

“Has Colonel Craven seen her?” asked Peter without a trace of emotion.

“Oh, dear no,” said Nurse Burrows emphatically. “Never even asked. Sent her flowers, and came to enquire twice a day. But she didn’t know he was here, of course, till she got back her memory yesterday. Then she wrote him a note, and he went off to London.”

“I had better see the doctor first,” said Peter, after a pause.

“He ought to be in the hospital somewhere by now,” said Matron, “it’s his time, and past. Go off and see if you can find him, Nurse. He might be in the Lydia Danby ward.”

Nurse Burrows whisked off, and Peter sat down and set his teeth.

Gaenor was there, somewhere over his head, in this quadrangular bare building, whose corridors were haunted by the breath of ether and iodoform. She had tried to escape him, and thrown in her lot with Craven, and fate — or Providence? — had intervened.

What was to happen now?

His marriage must, he supposed, be annulled; but meanwhile he could not leave the girl who was still called his wife to Craven’s care. Until the bond was severed, she must submit to his guardianship.

The Matron excused herself and slipped away. He

was left alone. Two young nurses passed along the echoing passages, laughing. A door closed with a long, subdued reverberation.

"Oh, what a fool! What a conceited fool I've been!" raged Peter inwardly.

A sharp, light stride, a pattering footfall, the murmur of voices, and the nurse led in the captive doctor.

Peter once more gravely explained the *impasse* which Gaenor's loss of consciousness had caused. The doctor thought that there was no doubt that her husband's arrival would be the best thing for the patient. "She is convalescent," he said; "there is no longer any congestion, but there is a state of nervous tension which I don't like and can't explain. Mrs. Garstin seems to have a good constitution and a fine physique, though she is so small-boned and slender, but her nervous system shows signs of disturbance."

"She has been through very trying experiences," said Peter, "and this accident, coming just now, is most unfortunate. Do you think she might be moved from this place? I don't mean to suggest a railway journey. But, if I went out and secured rooms, might I take her to them — and this lady, too," indicating Nurse Burrows.

The doctor shook his head. "I wouldn't move her for the next few days," he said. "See what effect your coming has upon her. It may do her good, it may disturb her — one cannot quite tell. But my advice is to wait and see."

"You think I may pay her a visit?"

“ I’ll go up and have a look at her first, if you don’t mind waiting.”

Gaenor had been long alone. She was beginning to feel apprehensive, of she knew not what.

Nurse Burrows had left her when the story was at an interesting point, throwing her back upon her own intolerable suspense. Nothing mattered in the world but the contents of the letter from Peter, which must have awaited her these days past — how many!

The doctor tapped at the door and came in, smiling. He overhauled his patient, felt her pulse, and shook his head in reproof of her melancholy state.

“ You don’t deserve a treat,” he said, “ and that’s the truth.”

“ A treat, Doctor — you have a treat for me? ”

He stood half way between the bed and the door. “ A visitor,” he suggested archly.

Her colour flamed. She made a movement holding out her hands — “ No, no, no! I cannot see anyone — ”

— “ Except him,” corrected the doctor maliciously.

She held her hand to her head. What *did* she feel? Terror of his cold scorn — triumph that he had found her out — or what beside?

The thing that floated uppermost was that, at whatever cost, her famine for the sight of him must be appeased.

“ Of course — I didn’t mean — him,” she faltered, with a little nervous laugh which the doctor found very fascinating.

“ Then I shall tell him to come up? ”

She assented mutely. She could not speak. . . .

Oh, why had she not called for nurse and a hand mirror? What a fright she must be looking! — She made a weak attempt to call back the doctor. But, no! If Peter were in the house, she *must* see him, even if he should curse her! But cursing, she reflected, was not Peter's way.

CHAPTER XX

CHAMPION OR JUDGE?

"From days laid waste across disastrous years,
From hopes cut down across a world of fears,
We gaze with eyes too passionate for tears,
Where faith abides, though hope be put to flight."
SWINBURNE.

His step echoed in the passage. He came in. Gaenor's eyes flew to the hard, tight line between his lips.

They were firmly set, for Peter was horribly afraid of breaking down. Gaenor in health — deserting him, defying him — was one thing. Gaenor in a narrow white bed, with the hair he had longed to caress drawn in two long, glistening ropes down her shoulders — with a face so transparent that the vivid blood played under it like summer lightning, and a look in her eyes that seemed to him quite unbearable in its intensity of appeal — this was quite another matter.

"Oh, *Peter!*" she gasped out, and only that, because his cold rigidity cut her off short, as if he had passed a swift knife across all the cords that bound them. In a revulsion of feeling, as rapid as it was dreadful, she told herself that he was cruelly unsympathetic. Had she not done all she could? Was she responsible for an accident?

He was approaching — he was offering his hand —

Peter, who should have been champion, was judge, after all. . . .

The hard world reeled away from her.

"Nurse!" cried Peter, in agonized tones, "come quickly — she's fainted!"

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"No, I shan't go," said the young husband firmly, "she must grow used to the sight of me. There! She is moving now. She will be all right in a few minutes."

Perfume floated about Gaenor's returning senses. She was stroked by a gentle hand upon her brow. She was upheld against somebody's shoulder.

In the borderland between consciousness and oblivion the peace she had lately enjoyed enveloped her once more. With her eyes still luxuriously closed, she smiled.

The smile made Peter tremble.

"Open your eyes, lovie, it's all right," said Nurse Burrows soothingly.

She came back to the real world, and the consciousness of him who stood beside the bed.

"There now," said nurse gently, "what did you want to go and do that for? Let me lay you back on your pillow, and then I'll leave you both to have a nice little sensible chat. Bless me! I think you deserve a good scolding, but I dare say Mr. Garstin will let you off?"

The kind woman laid the girl down upon her pillow, slipped the smelling-salts into her hand, and disappeared.

Gaenor kept her eyes down. If she did not look at Peter it was more bearable. He was speaking — quite gently, but very coldly.

"I am sorry I had to come. I don't wish to distress you, but it seems to me very important that you should have someone to — to look after you. Please believe I am not here to scold you. It is only that I think you made a serious mistake in going away from me."

He spoke slowly, haltingly. While listening to his words she steadied herself — hardened herself to the sound of his voice.

"I — I didn't know what else to do," she faltered.

"I am afraid," said he gravely, "that of all plans you could have tried, you chose the very worst, speaking from your own point of view. But we won't talk of that now. Let us do what we can. I think my best plan would be to go and find comfortable apartments and take you there, and persuade the nurse — if you like her — to come, too. I won't urge you," he added hastily, as she made some movement of dissent, "but if you think you could bear it, I should be really grateful — I shall not look quite such a fool as I have done for the last five days."

This was to put the matter on a different footing. For her own advantage she would not consent to any plan, but for his there was no hardship she would not have undergone.

"If you wish it . . . if you think it best . . . of course," she faltered.

"Thank you," said Peter, feeling that the opposition had suddenly and unaccountably broken down.

He had no more to say. Never had he felt so wholly at a loss. With all his resentment, his wounded love, his jealousy and hate seething in him, there was

no word that he dare utter, because she must not be excited. He sat, clenching his teeth to keep it all behind them, until his eyes, glowering down upon her drooped face and down-cast lashes, saw the colour mounting and spreading under the white skin in an agonized blush.

His own inimitable gift for the commonplace stepped in and saved him.

"Well, now," he said, "the first thing is to tell the Matron I am going to move you; and the second, to get your luggage. I enclosed the check for it in my letter to you. If I may open the letter when it comes, I will send it to town, with orders to forward your trunks at once to the station here." His voice sounded quite sane and cool.

"Thank you; you are most considerate. How — how did you know that I was here?"

"Quite by accident," said Peter shortly.

There was another pause.

"Should you prefer rooms with a sea view?" asked Peter politely.

"Oh — just as you please — I don't mind. It will not be for long. I shall soon be well."

"I hope so."

Another pause.

"Have you been in England — all the time?" asked Gaenor timidly.

"In London."

A further pause.

"Well," said Peter, rising, "I think I had better not

stay. We can't very well discuss things till you are stronger, can we?"

"I suppose not."

"Good-bye, then, until to-morrow. I shall bring a carriage for you about four."

She raised her eyes. He was on his feet, very erect. He did not hold out his hand. Her lids were instantly lowered.

"I have plenty of money to pay for my time here," she said.

"But I hope you will allow me to keep up appearances to the extent of doing that myself. Don't expose me to unnecessary humiliation."

"I beg your pardon." She caught her breath in what might have been a sob.

As he left the room his senses were so subdued to the spell of her that he forgave himself for having been be-fooled before.

A man, he thought, might be pardoned for holding her innocent, even now, had he not known what Peter knew.

CHAPTER XXI

PETER FINDS IT HARD

“At first view
I felt quite sure that God had set
Himself to Satan. Who would spend
A minute's mistrust on the end?”

R. BROWNING.

OCTOBER was warm and mellow that year. On the coast the time might have been the heart of summer. The blue sea danced and sparkled, the public gardens were still gay with bloom; except for the short afternoons and comparatively cold nights, the year might have gone back to July.

Gaenor gained strength rapidly. She drove each afternoon with Nurse Burrows, whom the Matron obligingly spared to accompany her patient, the rooms in the Cecilia paying ward being all, as it chanced, vacant.

Peter excused himself from driving. He said he needed exercise.

He lunched most days with his wife, but seldom came in to tea, as he had joined the Golf Club and played every afternoon.

For the first week Gaenor was put to bed before dinner, and even when permitted to sit up to dine was still marched off to bed directly afterwards.

As the days passed both husband and wife realized increasingly that in a very short time all excuse for keeping the nurse would be done away, and that they must be left to face the future and each other.

Gaenor was at a loss to account wholly for her husband's sustained coldness; she was puzzled by the fact that in bodily presence he appeared much colder than his letters.

In the last of the three — which he had penned after Wyman and he had discussed the trial evidence — he told her that he was awaiting only her information and co-operation, and then they would together decide what steps they could take to ascertain where the false swearing was. He urged her with all the earnestness of which he was capable, to come back to him and state her own case, assuring her that he had no preconceived convictions, that he was honestly anxious to consider anything she might bring forward.

This letter was to her a beacon light of hope. She read it after his first visit to the hospital. When he returned the following day to fetch her, she had schooled herself to give him a better welcome; she reproached herself as being alone to blame for his rigid demeanour of the previous day. She had run away from him, had fainted at the sight of him — it was obviously for her to make the first advance.

She made it timidly — and entirely without effect. Peter was as marble.

His unfailing politeness was dreadful to her. It made an armour which no shy girl could pierce.

She could not understand him. His letter had ex-

pressed the greatest eagerness to go into their case. But since they had been together he had never mentioned the subject. He perused no documents, wrote no letters — he merely played at golf.

She dared not be the first to introduce the burning topic. His total indifference was an unspoken answer to any question she might have put. The reason for his change of attitude tormented her, day and night. As things were, it was bitterness to be under his roof, eating his bread. He talked to her, when they were together, of the manœuvres of the Fleet, the coming visit to London of foreign royalty, the arrival of her parents' boat at Suez, or the novel he had been reading.

He kept her well supplied with interesting literature, and was never domineering, but anxious to give her as much liberty as he could.

Each morning she knew she ought to say:

"I am well now. It is time that Nurse should leave."

Each day she feared to send away the one barrier that stood between her and the iceberg Peter.

The Matron settled it. Two new cases came in, and she sent for Nurse Burrows in a hurry.

That kind woman departed in tears, just before lunch, vowing to remember and love Mrs. Garstin all her life, and treasuring a handsome silver-mounted umbrella, presented by her grateful patient.

She was gone. Gaenor was left unprotected to face Peter, and what other dreadful things might be in store for her.

He did not come in to lunch. She took that meal alone. Peter was going round the course with a man

who had to leave by an afternoon train. Contrary to his custom, he came in at about three, at which hour she was usually out driving.

She felt positively sick with terror when he entered, arrayed in his thick tweeds and knickerbockers. He was much tanned, but under the brown colour his face looked drawn and his eyes hollow. Gaenor had noted the silver threads in his hair; she even thought they had multiplied during the past fortnight. He had not expected to see her, and halted on the threshold before going to deposit his clubs in a corner. She rose from the chair where she had been sitting in the window, with a pretence of work.

"Good morning," she said, with a pitiful effort to speak naturally. "Nurse has gone. Matron sent for her about eleven o'clock."

"Indeed!" He stopped short, half the width of the room from her. "That's unfortunate, but of course I can get you another nurse."

"Another? What for? I am perfectly well now," she assured him hurriedly. "I — you must see that I am able to face things. I have been, for some days." . . . There was a pause; and, because a pause was worse than anything, she rushed forthwith upon the sword. "Oh, Peter, you must see that this can't go on! Tell me what I am to do."

He looked so distressed that she would have given much to recall her words.

With a heavy gesture of one wholly at a loss, he sat down by the centre table, leaning his arm upon it.

"You have asked me the one question I can't an-

swer," he replied blankly. "I have no idea what you are to do."

This was unexpected. Gaenor felt an inrush of formless fear, a dread of something worse than she had been able to conjecture. She made a step forward.

"I—I will do anything you wish. I will answer any questions you may ask," she said impetuously.

He did not look at her, but out across the dancing sea, lively in the autumn breeze. He was feeling in the breast-pocket of his coat.

His wife watched with an absorbed fascination as he drew out a pocket-book, extracted thence a newspaper cutting, and looked at it.

Rising, he walked round the table, handed it to her, saying: "I fear you cannot have seen this," and turning abruptly away began to pace the room, his hands behind him.

Gaenor read:

"A marriage has been arranged, and will take place on the 15th of November, between Colonel Charles Craven of Otterbeck, Brancs. and Mrs. Lyons of Liss Court in the same county."

She glanced at it almost impatiently. "I had not seen it, but I am not surprised," she said, perplexed. "What does it matter to us?"

Peter came to a halt on the hearth-rug, eyes blazing.

"Gaenor, it is no time for trifling," he said in tones of cold anger. "You must explain yourself to me. This man, for whose sake I believe you to have perjured yourself—for whose company you left me on your wedding day—"

“*Peter!*”

—“Has abandoned you! Entangled as he is with debt and poverty, he has betrayed your trust, and is going to marry the rich woman the moment the decree is made absolute. Now I ask you, as a sensible person — what is to become of you? If I throw you off, you are done for — your place in society irretrievably lost! — And yet, as you said awhile since — how can the present state of things go on? . . . Have you any way out that you can suggest?”

“Peter, Peter, what are you saying? I perjured myself? I ran away from you to him? You must be mad!”

“Come, this is ridiculous, and can serve no purpose. Do you deny that Craven travelled from Paris and crossed to Southampton with you — that he took you to the hospital, remained in the neighbourhood until he knew you were on the way to recover, and did your confidential errand in town — on his way to propose to the other woman —?”

“That’s all a jumble of true and false. I did *not* run from you to him — but I did see him at the railway station in Paris, and again he found me on the boat — it was just accident. Peter . . . you have *got* to believe that!”

He walked away with a kind of groan.

“You seem to think that if you only swear black to be white persistently enough, you can convince any jury — or husband,” he said with bitterness.

She let herself sink upon a chair, grasping the arms of it. “You see, it is of no use for me to struggle,”

she said drearily. "I am caught in this web of lies, and I can't get out. I think God punishes some people too hard. I have only been silly. . . . Many people seem to be really wicked and to get off far more easily than I have."

He made no reply. He had wandered to the wide bay-window, and was standing with his back turned, because he dared not look at her. The bitterness which he had been nursing alone during this awful fortnight was gnawing him. She rose.

"I see," she spoke faintly. "My first idea was the right one. When I found that I could not make you see the truth, I took myself away, out of your life. I must do it again, and this time effectually. As you cannot believe me, it is of no use for me to stand here protesting."

She went to the table and began to collect her things which lay about — work, writing materials and other trifles.

Suddenly, passion flamed in her.

"Why did you come and find me? Why did you bring me here? It was cruel of you!" He turned a strange, drawn face to her. "You wrote as if you held out a hope — a hope that you might do something for me — you asked me to speak openly to you" — she paused because his expression really frightened her.

"Quite so," he replied. "But many things have come to light since I wrote those letters. At that time, you had done me, so far as I knew, only two wrongs. You had married me with this secret between us, and you had left me. That was all I had discovered. It

was afterwards that I watched Craven go into the post office, to fetch my letters — with a written warrant from yourself. Even then I suspended judgment. When I visited you at the hospital, in spite of that knowledge, I told myself there might be some explanation. I did not know that he had been your travelling companion, that he had brought you here — nor the extent to which he had made himself financially responsible for you.”

She caught her breath sharply. “Mr. Craven made himself financially responsible for me?”

He twisted his face into a hateful smile. “When I went to settle your bill at the hospital, I found that on your arrival Craven paid a week in advance for you.”

To this blow she had no answer. She stood with lowered head, accepting her humiliation. The hopelessness of the situation was numbing her faculties, as the bodily functions of one tightly bound with cords become numbed.

“I know . . . of course . . . that I have something for which to ask forgiveness,” she said slowly. “I ought not to have waited until we were married, to tell you of my . . . trouble. But you believe so many falsehoods against me that it bewilders me. Instead of feeling sorry, I feel outraged; instead of penitence, I am choked with anger. I could tell you much, if only you would believe my word. To one who calls me a liar to my face, I can have nothing to say.”

“Oh,” said Peter under his breath, “this is terrible! I can’t bear it.” He pushed up his fingers among his hair with a gesture suggesting wildness. “Can’t you

see"—he could hardly articulate—"that it is not a question of *your word*, but of *facts*? . . . All this about Craven cannot be gainsaid. I *know* that he was in Paris all the time that we were there. He arrived two days after you did, and left the same day. Your brother was terribly afraid, on the wedding morning, of my running against him. We did, as a matter of fact, meet on the stairs. He was actually in my hotel. That seemed to me the most cynical stroke of all. You joined him at Paris, made the crossing together. He took you to the hospital. We simply mustn't argue about all this. It is the horrible truth. This final fact, of the brute's approaching marriage to someone else, is what makes the case so desperate. But I must do my best for you, since I have vowed to do so. For pity's sake, let us get the business details settled. You have a settlement of six thousand pounds. As now invested, it represents about £220 a year. I will allow you another hundred a year. Of course we must part; there can be no other course for us. But try—try to make some kind of a future for yourself. You must not sink—"

His voice died away.

Gaenor made no attempt at reply. She stood propped against the table, her head slightly thrown back, her eyes closed. He paced the room once or twice.

"There is one thing more," he brought out at length; "something I ought to say, before this atrocious half-hour ends. Don't suppose that I think worse of you than I really do. I know that a young, proud girl, in-

nocent and ignorant, has no chance with a bad man. He is the villain, but it is you who suffer. If I had known . . . if you had only had the courage to tell me . . . I might perhaps have saved you — have snatched you out of his power at the last moment: but I was not great enough for that. I misunderstood. I had the sense to see that you had been hurt, somehow — that you had gone through some experience which had saddened you. But I made the mistake of supposing it to be all in the past. I wanted to win you gradually — to coax you back to an interest in life before I offered you . . .” he made a long pause, but persevered, and got out the word . . . “before I offered you *love*. Don’t believe I hold you guilty of what the jury pronounced. I don’t. Even now I don’t. I am the man that wanted to save you — that made a snatch at you, but was not strong enough to hold on. But for all my shortcomings, I still want to help you — to make some plan for you. Tell me what you would like best to do, where you would go, what companion you would have.”

She made a gesture of repudiation, with both hands. Gesture of any kind was so foreign to her that the act had a peculiar, solemn symbolism.

“That is enough,” she said hurriedly, “I can’t bear any more. I refuse everything — your money, your compassion, your help in any form. If I were a guilty woman, I would thank you, but I am not, and so I must decline all. But before I go, you must allow me one last word. Though you cannot believe, I owe it to myself to speak. You tell me that you have read

the accounts of my trial. Every word I uttered in the witness-box was the exact truth, and the whole truth. I omitted nothing, I added nothing. And for the other point. I had no idea that Colonel Craven was in Paris. Ronald may have known, but he did not tell me. I met him by accident at the station, when I was escaping from you. When I saw him, I was afraid. He had heard somehow that I was married, and he offered his congratulations, and told me he was going to be married, too. I did tell a lie then, for I made him believe that you were in the train. I travelled to Le Havre in a *Dames seules*. He found me again on the deck of the boat, and I told him you were sea-sick in your berth. He spoke to me against my will. I declined to listen. He persisted. I got up and went off to take refuge in the ladies' cabin. As I went, I became aware that he was following me. I lost my head, and ran. The light was bad. I stumbled at the top of the stairs and must have fallen down them. I remember nothing more until I was in the hospital. If ever you learn the truth, please remember that I told you this. Good-bye."

She took up in her hands the things which she had collected, turned, and with a vehement, unexpected movement, left the room and ran upstairs.

CHAPTER XXII

PETER BELIEVES

"How soon a smile of God will change the world!"

R. BROWNING.

LEFT alone, Peter felt himself as it were released. He could think. The trouble was that when Gaenor was there he could only feel. In her company he stood all the while on the very brink of his own sane self-possession. It seemed to need but a slight provocation to cast him pleading at her feet, crying that nothing mattered if only she would love him.

This it was that made him so unnaturally hard. It was, he told himself, preposterous, that when he was alone he hated her, he resented the unspeakable injuries she had inflicted upon him, but when she stood there in bodily presence, he could not fasten his mind upon anything, for all his senses were flowing towards her in one strong stream.

If she were to make the least advance — if she condescended to appeal — to plead — he knew in himself that he could not withstand, and the thought made him furious.

Yet, illogically, he resented her pride, her defiance. She would not condescend to employ her feminine weapons for a moment. In all their acquaintance she had

never done so. Perhaps there was no tenderness in her? Perhaps she was hard all through?

When the question presented itself, there rose to his mind unbidden the vision of her face and eyes in the Church in Paris, as she spoke the words that bound her to him. He remembered the fervour, the exaltation, and the impression he had afterwards received in the carriage, of an emotion deep but dumb. How lightly he had skated over it! With what graceful, joyous flippancy he had conversed! He had thought he knew that beneath the lightness was a treasure to which he might, when the moment came, reach out his hand, and gather it to his heart.

Dead sea fruit!

His mind retraced without ceasing the weary puzzle. Surely the Lisles, in coercing the miserable girl, must have known the secret could not be kept. Then why not have told him the truth? The sordid answer stared him in the face. *They dared not risk it.*

Why then had Gaenor consented to such a course? If she were a bad girl the reason was fairly obvious. She had apparently known Craven to be pledged elsewhere, and she would want to marry somebody — anybody who might offer. He remembered Wyman saying that at the conclusion of her trial she had had several offers of marriage; but she had not accepted these. If she were a good girl — a girl such as he had always thought her, both proud and pure — there could be but one cause which his reason could accept. It must have been because *she loved him.*

Great Heaven! Suppose she did!

Suppose that now, at this very moment, every pulse in her was longing for him, as his for her — that the current of her being was setting towards him with a force of attraction as compelling as that which moved him? The mere surmise was overwhelming.

Might she not have yielded to the cowardly desire of her family to shelve a dangerous topic, in the conviction that when he knew the truth — of her love for him — he could be trusted to see truly in the matter of her false accusation?

And would not a sudden agony of wounded love and pride account better than anything else for her flight from Versailles?

This new idea was making chaos in his mind again. If her parting words to him were true, how he must be lacerating this love which he now imagined in her!

He caught his mind back — snatched it, as it were — from the dangerous course it was pursuing.

A man would be a maniac who could take to his heart a woman against whom lay such heavy charges, so weightily proved.

Yet he knew that all along his own judgment had sided against the apparent facts; and mixed with all his other tempestuous feelings was a wild ambition to prove his judgment right.

He ceased his unresting pacing to and fro, and flung himself into a chair by the table. Gaenor had left lying thereon the book she had been reading from the circulating library.

He took it up idly. It was *The Ring and the Book*. There was a folded note slipped between two

pages in which certain passages had been pencil-marked. It was the Pope's vindication of Pompilia.

"What does the world, told truth, but lie the more?" was one line underscored; then came the passage beginning:

"A second time the plot is foiled—"

Peter read on to —

"God's gift of a purity of soul
That will not take pollution; ermine-like
Armed from dishonour by its own soft snow."

Then came the outburst of praise of the young warrior-priest, who —

"When the first moan came from the martyr-maid
At that uncaging of the beasts —"

"gave such good

Great undisguised leap over post and pale
Right into the mid cirque."

.

Was it possible that in him, Peter, the orderly, the decorous, Gaenor had thought she recognised a champion?

All the soul that was in Peter Garstin gave a vast bound upwards. He almost felt the physical effort of the ascent.

What if, after all, spite of adverse verdict, Gaenor were pure right through — and not merely pure, but *his own*?

If that were so, he must go fight her battle first of all.

The change in his mental attitude was as surprising as complete. During all that fortnight he had been

hardening himself against her — telling himself that he despised her, that he must resist her. Now he saw himself unworthy to touch her, until he had proved his manhood in her eyes.

From first to last, she had never pleaded; she had never excused herself. She had presented him with a problem; as he approached it, so must she judge him. It had been he, Peter, who was on his trial, not his wife.

Supposing he had had the presence of mind to be silent concerning what Wyman had told him, he might have learned more of this strange girl. He had prejudged the case — had forced her hand; coming before her with an accusation which was in itself so deadly an insult as to destroy her belief in him.

She had left him because in those few bitter moments, she had weighed him and found him wanting.

She was right. From the depth of his newly awakened heart he admitted that she was right. He had failed her, and she had shown her disappointment in him. This was what he needed, whether or no she was aware of the fact. He needed a cross whereon to be raised to higher levels.

Alone in the lodging-house first-floor front, Peter knelt before the silent message his wife had left him.

“How can man love, but what he yearns to help?”

There glowed the burning words before him on the page; and the man’s yearning to help grew and waxed hot, and flamed; but how he could do this he knew not.

A long time passed; a state of mind which he could not think worthy of being dignified by the name of prayer, yet which was certainly a white heat of upward

desire. As his thought came back to a consciousness of external things, he became aware that the note which Gaenor had used as a book-marker was lying open on the table before him and that, long before he was conscious of doing so, he had been reading it.

It was the note written to her at the hospital by Craven.

It was too late to ask himself if he had any right to read it; already he had seized upon the important part.

“Confidential information — vital for you to hear.”

He took up the paper and read it from end to end.

The note of respectful, admiring regret which it breathed was unmistakable.

In a moment Peter knew that what he had to do was to see Craven.

Reckless of the ethical significance (if any) of his conduct, he folded the note and carefully bestowed it in his pocket-book. Then, hastily leaving the room, lest his courage should fail him, he ran upstairs and knocked at his wife's door.

There was no answer, but whereas, when he knocked, there had been sounds within, there was now a sudden hush.

“Gaenor,” said Peter softly, “please let me in.”

He heard her slow footfall approach the door; the key turned, and she opened to him.

Her face was white and dim as it had been on the night he saw her first, in Brittany, at the circus. It was the expression described so mightily by George

Meredith in *Diana of the Crossways*,—the woman hunted by the man-pack—whose shame finds refuge in sullen indifference.

“I want to say something. I must come in,” said Peter, suiting the action to the word.

She was packing. Her things lay on the bed, neatly folded—drawers and cupboards were open, and empty.

He closed the door carefully. She retreated to the dressing-table, then turned, asking, “What is it?” in perfectly expressionless tones.

The young man had obeyed an impulse stronger than himself. Now that again they stood face to face, as he had felt they must never stand again, all the agony of embarrassment, the false shame, the inability to say what he thought, flooded him once more.

The emotionless demeanour of his wife was the one thing which saved him; but as he spoke, hanging his head, nervously fingering the fringe of the table cover, he felt like a raw boy, who bore no relation at all to the Peter Garstin of whom he thought so highly.

“Gaenor,” he said, “I know you must be disappointed in me. I know I’ve failed you at every turn. Will you—I’ve come back to ask—will you give me one more chance?”

She had been standing with averted head. As these astonishing words fell on her ear, she slowly turned. What had happened to Peter in the hour since she left him? What could account for this change of front?

There dawned upon her face something of the look that Elsa of Brabant may have worn when far off fell

upon her ear a distant answer to the bugle of the challenger.

"I don't understand —" she managed to say.

"I've got to believe in you or go mad," said Peter doggedly. "Well, I do. I say I do. But of course I must prove it, somehow. . . . Will you, because this is of importance — will you answer me frankly on or two questions? Here is the first: Did you mean — to tell me about all this — yourself?"

"Yes." The monosyllable came unhesitatingly. "I meant to tell you — that night. I was a coward, I had not the heart to spoil our beautiful day at Versailles — I thought I could tell you later — in the train."

"*Our beautiful day*," repeated Peter.

He raised his head, looking at her wistfully. In spite of her altered tone, and prompt reply, there were no signs of the love he had imagined in her. She was cold, and very much aloof.

"One thing more," he said. "One more question — I must ask it —" he came two steps forward in his excitement — "Did you think I should believe, and understand?"

She answered without hesitation that question also.

"It never occurred to me to doubt that you would.

"Oh!" he said brokenly, and turned away to the mantelpiece that he might hide his face in his arms.

She went to the window, turning her back upon her distress. She bent her eyes, hot with smarting tears upon the dancing waves below, and the gulls circling in the sunshine. She was terrified, for she knew herself to be near the end of her tether. She hoped Peter

would go away. She had answered his questions. The silence endured, and she began to tremble. Peter had left the mantelpiece and was standing behind her.

"Only one more question, then I've done," he said, in tones over which he seemed to have no control. "*Why did you marry me, Gaenor?*"

She twisted her hands together, and the surging blood in her ears was so loud that she could hardly hear her own scared voice.

"I won't answer that — *now* — I won't! I won't! I won't!"

She was dizzy, half frantic — appalled — she knew she had but to turn to him — to reply truly to his eager question — and she would be drowned, submerged in the answering passion which she felt in him. Every nerve in her thrilled to him, every impulse was crying for its gratification: just to fling herself into Peter's arms and surrender the burden of everything!

What held her back?

The subtle under-knowledge that, so far, Peter was craving her against his better judgment.

If he touched her — if he laid but a hand upon her straw barrier, down it would go . . . and nothing had happened that day to make it different from the terrible foregoing days. She was still the girl who had deceived him — had, as he thought, left him for Craven, on his wedding-day. . . .

"No," she reiterated, faintly, inarticulately, "I can't! I can't!"

Peter made a sound between a gasp and a sob — she shrank away in panic, upon the very point of sur-

render, but feebly fighting still for honour and self-respect. At her movement he turned about sharply, and retreated the whole length of the room.

He was in a state of feeling between victory and chagrin. Her refusal to answer his question, was in itself the answer he desired. Her resistance conveyed to him a message:

"Fight my battles first."

"You are right," he said, after a while, in more normal tones. "I admit that you are right. I accept your answers; all of them. Now for what comes next. You and I must go to London to-morrow. We must go together, if you please. You must try, this afternoon, to engage a maid to go with you. I dare say the Matron could put you on to the right person. We will go to a hotel, for I have business in town which may take me several days—I hardly know how long. At the end of that time, I hope to come to you with—a passport. . . . Until then all that I ask is that you will not leave me."

She made no reply.

"Well?" he asked, after an interval. He did not dare raise his head and look at her. "Do you agree to my terms? Will you give me a last chance, before leaving me again?" As he spoke he was moving across the room, to the door. When he reached it, he ventured upon a glance.

Gaenor had fallen upon her knees and one hand covered her eyes, while the other motioned him away.

"Yes," she said, "yes—*anything you say!* God bless you, Peter!"

CHAPTER XXIII

THE MEANING OF THE MOTOR-CAR

"So very kind was Lady Waldemar!"

E. B. BROWNING.

It was London — dim, grey London; the weather had changed. A slow, fine drizzle glazed the pavement, and the air had a raw, autumnal chill.

Gaenor had been out for a walk, but had turned back, daunted by the meteorological conditions.

Her husband and she were staying at the Queen Mary Hotel for some time. It was a period which always, in after life, when she looked back upon it, reminded Gaenor of a dream.

Peter and she hardly saw one another, and when they met were afraid to look at each other. The young man was wholly absorbed in the work he had taken in hand, and, when he was not off upon journeys connected with the collection of evidence, spent his time in Wyman's chambers, getting up his case with the expert help of his friend.

The course of their investigations made it necessary that Peter should go down to Otterbeck. This he was obliged to do with some secrecy, as, until the result of his researches should be certain, he did not wish his sister, Mrs. Palmer, to know what he was doing.

During these days Gaenor made no enquiries, and

volunteered no information, though she frankly gave all the details for which she was asked. There had been a long evening, when Wyman had dined with them, his manner to her deferential to the point of embarrassment. Peter and he had put many questions to her, some of them striking her as puzzlingly irrelevant, as to the people who had formed her circle of friends round Otterbeck, and their relations one to another. They had also made her give an exact account of her wanderings during the foggy night upon the links. She had made a rough pencil sketch, at Mr. Wyman's request, of the place in which she had stopped and slept. She was sure that it was under some beech trees, and she described as well as she could the woodland path which had led thence, out into the lane which brought her to the high road.

The questions put by both men had been searching, their manner carefully impartial, but she received the impression increasingly throughout the interview that they believed what she said. She had some indiscretions to confess. Lady Barbara was always unpopular throughout the neighbourhood, her husband very popular. Gaenor had to admit that she used to enjoy the notion of annoying the helpless wife, who, ailing, plain, and unloved, had no weapons with which to fight the arrogance of charming youth.

At the trial, when the secret agony of the wretched woman had been exposed, Gaenor had hated herself for her thoughtless folly. She had not meant to hurt. She was but trying her power. She was in the unstable condition of the just grown-up girl who finds herself

a power among men, and is not, at first, cautious enough to use her queenship discreetly.

"I know I was a beast. I hate to think about it," she owned in low, mortified tones. Both her hearers forgave her as they gazed.

The superficiality was all gone now from Peter's manner. Life was no longer a pleasure-cruise. The vortex of Search-after-Truth, which he had avoided, he now faced with braced muscles. Life and death hung, for him, not upon the making public, but upon the proving to his own satisfaction of his wife's innocence.

He blocked out all other considerations from view, as he brought all his own legal knowledge, all his friend's, all their united intelligence and powers of deduction, to bear upon this vital question.

Wyman and he, with a detective, had been down to Otterbeck for two or three days, and he had returned to the hotel in the small hours. Gaenor, as she entered the lounge after her walk, met him coming out. Tightly as he held himself in hand, he could not restrain altogether the effect which an unexpected sight of her would produce upon him. Their greeting was, however, the purely formal one which had by tacit agreement become their custom.

He asked after her health and apologized for the fact that he must leave her forthwith. He had an appointment, with Colonel Craven. As the flush called up by her appearance passed from his face, she saw that he was looking tired out and over-strained. She said so, with anxiety. He laughed away such an idea. He had no time, he said, to think whether he was tired or no.

The important thing was that she should keep well in this beastly weather. She assured him that she was well. He said she was too pale. The comment had the immediate effect of making his criticism untrue. He explained that he could not say when he would be in, and she begged him not to worry about her. They parted, she walking slowly upstairs to the sitting-room he had engaged for her; he pausing at the door to watch her retreating figure. She did not look back.

Seated alone among her work and books, she tried to occupy her fingers with some embroidery. In a few minutes, however, her hands lay idle in her lap, and her eyes were full of dreams.

The matter now going forward was a thing she had not contemplated. To her inexperienced mind, the decree *nisi* was matter of history — a thing that could not be reversed. That her husband would seek to reverse it was a thing she had never expected.

She had expected him to believe, and to understand, because she had seen him to be a man of fine calibre and keen insight. She had thought that he would rise above the 'brute world, howling,' and be convinced of her innocence, in spite of circumstances; but the circumstances themselves had seemed unalterable. Most certainly she had not intended to plunge him into litigation.

Now he was gone to confront Charles Craven. What would happen? Could he make him speak? Had he any magic power by which to compel the truth?

What was the truth? She did not know. She knew for a fact, that when she left the Colonel in the Pavilion,

she left him alone. The opinion of her own family, and of a good many others, was that the gamekeepers had been bribed to give false evidence, to support that of the two servants.

Was it possible that some woman really had been there? If so, who was she, and how did she get there?

Such questions were tormenting. She could not sit still. She rose and paced the room, feeling stifled.

She had loved Peter, ever since the night upon the Ile de l'Abbaye. But, since the scene between them in their lodgings at Southampton, she had adored him. The added strength of her feeling shook her. She was ready to kiss his feet. She could hardly face the idea of what she should do, if nothing transpired to confirm his belief in her.

"You think, if you only swear black to be white persistently enough, you can convince any jury — or husband."

The awful words still tore at her heart. There was nothing to support her persistent affirmation of the incredible truth; nothing but the negligible testimony of her fellow-delinquent.

She began to feel as if the little hotel boudoir would stifle her, and had just determined to go forth and brave the unpleasant day once more, when a hall-boy knocked and entered.

"A lady and gentleman to see you, ma'am, on urgent private business."

Gaenor looked up. "It must be a mistake," she began, and then noticed that the boy was holding out cards upon a salver.

Mrs. Lyons, Liss Court. Mr. Horace Lindsay.

Her heart jumped. "You will say that I cannot see them — no, stop a moment!" She tried to think. What could have brought them here? "You are sure that they asked for me — not for Mr. Garstin?"

"Quite sure, ma'am. The lady asked, was you quite alone."

She was bewildered and half fearful. Yet she felt that she must know what these people wanted — these false friends, as she had counted them, ever since Mrs. Lyons, by her evidence, had thrown discredit on Gaenor's story of her toothache.

"I will see them. Show them up," said she to the boy.

As soon as he was gone, she was assailed by a fear of having done wrong. What would Peter say? Would he approve? She could only trust that he would, for, long before it seemed possible, the rapid lift had shot up her visitors, and they were entering the room.

The first thing that struck Gaenor was that Mrs. Lyons was looking older. She was exquisitely gowned, a study of costly elegance from head to foot; but her face looked drawn and her eyes weary.

Mrs. Garstin did not go forward to meet her. She remained standing by the writing-table, on which she leaned her hand. She looked very slender, upright and unbending. The severe simplicity of her white cloth gown emphasized the contrast between the women.

Mrs. Lyons ignored the coldness. She went right up to Gaenor and snatched the hand down at her side.

"Oh," said she, "don't be cruel, Gaenor! Do be a little glad to see me! Of course I know my not having written to you does want a little explaining, but I can explain it! There is some wretched misunderstanding, and I have come to set it right. Won't you be a little glad to see me, Gae?"

A sudden hope kindled in Gaenor's heart. Could it be that Mrs. Lyons was going to atone? Was she going to throw light upon the mystery? "Of course I am glad to see you," she said, trying to make her voice cordial. "Please sit down, both of you. If you can explain things, I am only too ready to listen."

"Of course you will," replied the visitor, with what almost sounded like a sob of relief, subsiding upon a sofa as she spoke with much rustle of silken linings. "I knew that it could not be true — little Gae, who was always such a pet of mine, plotting to ruin me!"

Gaenor stared. "To ruin you?" she repeated blankly, watching with a dazed kind of fascination the slow arrangement by which Mr. Lindsay was bestowing his person upon a chair. "How could I, even if I wanted to? What are you talking about?"

"Before we go into that," responded Mrs. Lyons with a playfulness which sat ill upon her manifest anxiety, "it is the time for congratulations. A thousand loving wishes, my dear child, for your married happiness! I have brought you one or two trifling things — wedding-presents from Horace and me, which I want you to accept, with our love." She produced, from her muff, two or three jewel cases, which she tossed into the girl's lap. "Do you remember, Gae, when we

had all that fun at the theatricals, and I lent you these, how you used to declare that you would steal them? ”

The bride sat flushing and paling. She opened one of the cases hesitatingly, and the blinding flash of gems came from the blue velvet lining. She remembered well the occasion Mrs. Lyons had spoken of, the admiration of all the young girls, and the sum the lady had carelessly mentioned as the value of the necklace and parure which she had lent to be worn by her young friend.

“Forgive me, Mrs. Lyons, these things are much too costly for me to accept,” she said in a bewildered way. “Why should you give me such a magnificent present? What have I done to deserve it? ”

Constance laughed unsteadily. “Do you really like them so much? Let me try them on!” She took the sparkling thing from its case and clasped it round Gaenor’s neck. “There! Look at yourself in the glass! Isn’t that sweet? I always said it became you exactly, I’m so glad I thought of it! . . . What do you say? That you have done nothing to deserve it? Perhaps not, but you will, won’t you? You will do me a good turn if you can? ”

“Of course,” said Gaenor, “but nothing I could do — indeed these are far too valuable, Mrs. Lyons. I don’t wish to have them, I don’t think my husband would wish me to take them —”

“My dear — if you will render me the service that I desire, you might have twenty such necklaces and I would not think it over-paid,” said Mrs. Lyons softly. She had seated herself close to the girl, and she laid her hand over hers. “I suppose you know, don’t you, that

Mr. Garstan wants to reopen that miserable case of yours? That he is interposing to prevent the Decree being made absolute —”

Gaenor sprang to her feet; her hands clutched the glittering stones about her neck, pulled off the necklace and threw it upon a table. She had a revulsion of feeling which brought the scarlet blood to her face. “To bribe—you are trying to bribe me,” she gasped. “Why? Oh, why? *What have you to hide?*”

Mr. Lindsay stirred in his seat; he seemed to think the time had arrived when he might contribute something more than amiable smiles to the discussion.

“My sister’s intending to be married in November,” he said slowly. “But if the Decree isn’t made absolute—well, you see, the thing won’t come off.”

Gaenor stood very still, staring from one of them to the other. As she looked at the face of Constance, the features quite distorted with anxiety—she felt a sudden storm of self-accusation. Was she to ruin this woman’s future for the sake of clearing her own name?

“You see,” went on the brother ponderously, “it isn’t a bit of good. He’ll never prove anything, after all those months. Far better let it alone, then—what?”

“Gae,” struck in Constance, very softly, “that’s all we want you to do! Just to make your husband understand that there is nothing in this preposterous idea of his about the motor.”

“About the motor?” Gaenor literally jumped. “What motor?”

“I think you might have come to me first,” faltered

on the sweet voice. "It did seem so underhand, sending down detectives to work upon my poor chauffeur's honesty! But it is of no use; and, if it comes to bribing, we can do that, too, you know. . . ."

A flood of light illumined Gaenor's mind, as though all the lamps were switched on at once, in what had been a pitch-dark night. *The motor!* The motor she had heard hooting through the fog that fatal night upon the links! . . . So that was it. The Colonel had indeed had company with him in the Pavilion.

"If there is, as you say, nothing in my husband's idea about the motor," she said slowly, "why should you be in any anxiety?"

"Because," cried Mrs. Lyons passionately, "I will not bear even a breath of suspicion! I will not be humiliated before the whole county! I, against whom no word of scandal was ever whispered!"

"Yet," said Gaenor wonderingly, "you allowed me to be branded by an unjust verdict, to suffer for a sin you knew I never committed."

"Oh, come, Gae, that is rubbish! Branded by an unjust verdict, you say! And here you are, within six months, married to a charming fellow! Such a thing is nothing against a girl nowadays — rather the contrary."

"You are insulting," said Gaenor, breathing fast. "You find, however, that my husband is not content for me to remain under an undeserved stigma. It is for him to decide. Why do you come to me?"

"Because," replied Constance, her temper giving way

under the strain of the interview, "I was foolish enough to suppose that, having shown kindness to a little nobody, she might retain for me some vestige of affection, or gratitude."—

—"Gratitude! Affection!" said Gaenor very softly. "To you, who deserted me in the witness-box—who threw doubt on my evidence by your pretence of not remembering—"

"My pretence! Oh, Gaenor, how dare you?"

"Come, come, Con, I say," said Lindsay hurriedly, "you're not going the right way to work, old girl, you really are not—"

"If, as you both tell me, my husband is following a false clue," said Gaenor, still with that thrilling quiet, "then you have nothing to fear. But I am certain he intends to ascertain the truth somehow."

Mrs. Lyons rose. "It all comes," she said, in a low, shaken voice, "of taking up with people one knows nothing about. I was warned, too, that you were a dangerous girl. Several people said so. But I followed my heart instead of my head, and for that I must pay. The thing I feel most, is the refinement of cruelty by which you waited until our engagement was announced!"

"I told you all along, Con," broke in Horace, "that that announcement was a shocking mistake. Made the King's Proctor prick up his ears directly."

His sister, without replying, swept to the window and gazed forth upon the unlovely prospect, as if seeking time to decide what further to say or do.

Gaenor watched her in a distressing mixture of pity

and contempt. She remembered her affection and admiration for this woman. How lucky she had been considered when the charming, the exclusive Mrs. Lyons of Liss Court singled her out for notice! In her girlish enthusiasm she had made a cult of the beautiful lady. She had even wished to copy her style. How cleverly, how perfectly, she and her lover had concealed the terms on which they stood, from all the world! What a fool they had made of Gaenor, little insignificant Gaenor Lisle, who had the absurdity to imagine that Colonel Craven was in love with *her*!

She had been their stalking-horse in the eyes of all the neighbourhood.

Now the great lady was stooping to offer her a bribe.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE LAMIA WOMAN

“‘A serpent!’ echoed he; no sooner said,
Than, with a frightful scream, she vanished!”

KEATS. LAMIA.

FROM the first it had been the girl's impression — why she never quite knew — that Colonel Craven could, had he chosen, have cleared her. This impression had always been scouted by those in charge of her case. Her counsel had not been first-rate — even to clear his child, her father had felt himself unable to pay the crushing fees demanded by the great names. Her solicitor had argued that it was almost out of the question that any other woman of any social standing could have been in the Golf House that night. The admitted circumstances showed that no lady could have been there by appointment, for both Gaenor and Colonel Craven had testified to his unwillingness that she should leave him — which would have been quite unnatural had he been expecting anybody else. But more — even had he been expecting another, it was evident that the weather must have daunted the bravest.

Gaenor had always known that her counsel did not believe her story of her night out. He believed in her innocence, but felt sure that she had been compelled, after all, to remain in the shelter of the Pavilion for

the greater part of the night, and that she thought a persistent denial of this fact the only loophole for herself.

"These four men have sworn," it was argued, "that the lady who came out of the Golf House in the early hours, was of your height and size, and that she wore a motor-coat and veil. Can you give us any hint as to who this lady could have been, if not yourself?"

In effect, she could not. She had at that time no suspicion.

Standing there in the small, stuffy hotel room, her eyes upon the figure of Constance at the window, she recalled with a vivid flash of memory the way in which she had sprung upon her bicycle and flown off to Liss Court upon the terrible day when she had learned the staggering news that there was to be a divorce action, and that she — she, Gaenor Lisle — was to be made a party to that unspeakable thing! She remembered the feel of this woman's loving arms about her, of her impetuous kisses, her assurances that the verdict could not possibly go against her — that there was no evidence — that everybody who knew her could declare her innocence with unhesitating certainty.

Her mind wandered on to the trial. Again she felt the shock, the sick discomfort she had experienced during the cross-examination of Mrs. Lyons, her own witness, her champion, her devoted friend!

Even then she had not suspected. Looking back all along her intimate acquaintance with these two, Craven and Constance, she could not recall a word, a look, a gesture, that could have put her upon the track of their

secret. How blind she had been! Blind with conceit and self-deception! . . .

She became aware that Constance had turned from the window towards her, and was holding out her hands. She was speaking — her first words had not availed to call the girl back from her acute memories.

“What difference could it make to you?” she was pleading. “Who, but just the handful of hide-bound Otterbeck people, know that Mrs. Garstin was once Miss Lisle? You are married, you are happy — to you it is nothing, while to me it is life, love — everything that I ever wanted in this dreary world — and to him, poor wretch, the liberty he has craved so long in vain!”

Gaenor wrung her hands together. “You don’t seem to understand,” she said. “Can’t you see that it is not, to my husband or me, a question of happiness, but of truth or falsehood — honour or dishonour! Oh, surely you see that — you must know what I mean.”

“Oh, pooh, that is just sentiment!” cried Constance feverishly. “What difference does truth or falsehood make, so long as you are happy together? Gae, Gae, I must have your promise! Will nothing move you?”

Gaenor looked at Horace Lindsay, begging him by a gesture to take his sister away. “Please go, please go! I can say nothing to you, I can only tell my husband what you have said,” she repeated.

“Con, we had better cut it,” said the young man, going up to his sister, who had sunk into a chair with her arm resting on the table, her eyes fixed on the floor. “You see it’s no use to appeal to Mrs. Garstin’s feelings. She always was as hard as nails.”

"It was not my feelings that your sister appealed to first," said Gaenor with contempt, pushing the jewel-cases across the table to him.

Constance raised her eyes. "That's true," she said like one struck by a new idea, "I did you an injustice, Gae. I beg your pardon. I — truth to tell, I have gone the wrong way to work, altogether. I ought to have laid the facts before you. You don't know them, so you can't pity me. Horace — please go out of the room, and smoke a cigar in the lounge until I come. I must speak to Mrs. Garstin alone."

Gaenor did not demur. There was a new tone in Mrs. Lyons' voice and a changed look in her eyes. The young man went out without speaking, and the two women were left together.

The girl sat down facing her visitor across the table.

"Before you tell me anything confidential, please understand that I shall tell my husband all or any part of what you say, should I think it advisable," she said frankly.

Mrs. Lyons hesitated a moment. Then:

"You had better hear it all — hear it and judge me," she said, her white fingers tapping on the table her eyes fixed on the grey skies.

"You see, Gaenor, I have loved Charlie for seventeen years — and that is just half my life. You have only known him since his miserable life made him dull and heavy and cynical — you cannot tell how attractive he was then, full of health and youth and energy. He loved me as I loved him. My people came between. Charlie had almost nothing. His father had run

through nearly all the family fortune, Otterbeck itself was heavily mortgaged. My father wanted me for sale. He felt certain that I ought to fetch a good price in the marriage market. Charlie's people said he must marry money. Well! We gave in. We were not strong enough to fight. I was sold to Isaac Lyons, and Charlie married Barbara's money — or as much of it as he could get, which was precious little. . . .

"I tell you, Gae, for fourteen years I led the life of a Sultana in a harem. I drove out, seated beside my owner; I was exhibited to his friends, presiding at the head of his table. I was not permitted to run his house — that was done by highly trained experts. All my servants knew that I was no mistress, but a slave. My very correspondence was overlooked; my master never left me. I don't think, until his final illness, I was ever more than two or three consecutive hours out of his sight.

"He died almost suddenly, after only two or three days of being laid up, and when I found myself free I could not understand it at first. One of the first who wrote to me was Charlie, from whom I had never heard, whom I had never seen, for fourteen years. It was quite a short letter, but it told me he had never forgotten, and would like to see me. . . . I took Liss Court, just to be near him. It was not long before I realized how miserable he was. . . ."

"You ran into temptation," said Gaenor bluntly.

"Not deliberately. I had been so long a captive, I thought quite sincerely that a sight of Charlie now and then would be enough to make me happy. Of

course that was nonsense. A new kind of unhappiness soon set in, which made me feel as if my fourteen years of gaol had been nothing in comparison. I had to see him wretched and not be able to help him. There was one good thing. Lady Barbara knew nothing of his former friendship with me. For all that, we had to be most careful lest we might arouse suspicion and make it necessary for me to leave the neighbourhood. We were grateful for the mere chance of a handshake. That was how things were when you came to Green Acres. I own to you that I was pleased when I began to hear that Charlie was flirting with you. It served so admirably to keep attention away from us. I had, of course, no notion that anything could come of it—I mean, anything dreadful. Charlie is such a good sort—not that kind of man. It was not until the trial itself—it was not until we found out, for the first time, that Charlie and I had been seen, and that everybody took me for you, that I saw what it might mean. . . . *Liberty* for him and for me—escape from his misery and bondage—a verdict against him. . . .”

Gaenor sprang to her feet, her face ashen white, her limbs quivering. “It was you—you! And you never owned it!—You let me be taken for a—”

“Gae, don’t hate me—Gae, *listen!* . . . Of course I never meant it—I would never have done it, only I saw, I knew, that if I spoke out, there *would have been no divorce!* That was what tempted me! I had no time to think—until the case came on we never knew we had been seen! . . .”

The girl stood leaning both hands on the table, staring into the haggard face. "I don't understand. What were you doing there?"

"That is what I am going to tell you. Our being there at all was quite accidental. Horace and I had been out in the motor, and on our way home we drove into the fog. As we went on, it grew worse and worse, and once we missed the bridge and were almost in the river. That threw me into a complete panic, and I insisted that Horace must stop the car, and let us wait where we were until the mist cleared. Just at that moment we saw a light, and upon reflection Horace thought it must come from the Golf House, and that we were near the links. If there was a light there, somebody must be left. We thought we would risk making our way to find out who was there, and take whoever it was home when the fog lifted. Horace managed to drive the motor in through the first gate, where the motors usually stand, and we contrived, guided by the light, to reach the Pavilion. Charles was awfully surprised to see us, and not best pleased. I thought he seemed very sulky, and there is no doubt that it was you he expected to find outside when he opened the door. However, he could not turn us out into the fog, so there we stayed, all three of us. Instead of clearing, the mist got thicker, so we played bridge, made tea, and slept a little. My nerve had been badly shaken, and with that river to cross, I dared not start back till the weather lifted a bit."

She paused and, passed a handkerchief across her quivering lips. Gaenor made no comment.

"When at last we found that it really was possible to see some yards ahead, we determined upon a move. Horace went out first, to get the motor ready to start. Charlie and I followed him, perhaps a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes later. . . . You see, the two servants, and also the keepers, came along the Bird Copse footpath. If they had come in at the gate, they must have seen the motor and Horace. They could not see his lantern, because it was only a small one, and he had the light turned in to the bonnet of his machine. He did not light the head-lamps, purposely, in order not to attract attention. We wanted to get away quite quietly, not because we had any idea of such results as actually followed, but because it seemed wiser to conceal our prank, as we thought we easily could. We parted at the gate, Charlie going back to be scolded by Barbara, Horace and I to make our way rapidly home. We hardly spoke; we did everything with the utmost quiet, the two men pushed the car, which was our little one, the one Horace drives himself, out into the road, and some short way on before starting the engine. When we got home — which we did very fast, because the moment we reached the edge of the moor we found the weather practically clear — we did the same thing. We stopped the car outside the smaller gate — the one where there is no lodge, pushed it up the drive ourselves, and into the stable-yard without noise. Fortunately we had left orders that nobody was to sit up for us. Everything was quite dark and still. We slipped indoors with a latch-key, put ourselves to bed, and when the maids called us a couple of

hours later, there was nothing to suggest our having been out all night. We thought ourselves perfectly safe. . . .

“Had we had the least idea, beforehand, of the evidence which the other side had, of our being seen — I suppose everything would have turned out differently. But the thing was sprung upon us, without warning. Charlie was utterly confused. The only thought in his mind was that he could not speak out fully without compromising me. He knew how he and I had denied ourselves, how careful we had been, how we had done all in our power for so long to guard our friendship from all shadow of blame. He felt he could not speak without my permission —”

“And you refused it?”

“I refused it. I saw that if the truth were told, Barbara would not get her divorce. Charlie would be doomed to misery for ever. *I would not give him leave to tell.*”

The room was engulfed in silence. Gaenor sat with her face averted, her body quiet, her heart full of fire.

“Vindicated! Vindicated!” sang joy in her heart.

But before her was the lamentable figure of Constance.

The wretched woman sat bowed together, her tears dropping unheeded on her sapphire velvet. The muscles of her mouth seemed to have given away, her eyes were dim and red. She looked twenty years older than her age.

Gaenor's heart was torn with pity, yet she found no

words. For the moment she was drowned in the wonder of the knowledge that the incredible truth had come to light.

"Gae," pleaded the exhausted tones, "you have heard it all—you know all now. We are in your hands. Are you going to send back Charlie to his lifelong misery, and doom me to loneliness? Can you take your happiness at the price of all that is good in both of us?"

The generous integrity of Gaenor's nature leaped up in response to this appeal. A flood of compassion made her heart very soft. Peter and she were going to understand each other at last—the heroism of his defence of her against the world was to be rewarded. Did public opinion really matter? Was her open justification a matter of necessity? If Peter knew her innocent, then she could front with courage the ignorant judgment of others.

If Peter were but there! She longed to lay the question before him. Was it necessary to expose this poor thing, who craved her happiness after so many years of servitude? Could she not count upon her husband's generous endorsement, if she said—"Yes! I promise you that he and I will keep your secret—go and be happy!"

The words were upon her mouth, when a rush of new thoughts stayed her. Did any good ever come of the deliberate bolstering up of a lie?

What were the facts?

These two, Constance and Craven, had loved, deeply and really. They had allowed their love to be over-

ridden, because they were both afraid to face poverty. Craven had gone on to commit a more serious baseness. He had married, for her money, a woman, who, with all her faults, loved him with all the force of a narrow, unloved nature.

It was not a question of the four of them — Peter and Gaenor, weighed in the scale against Constance and Craven. There was a fifth factor in the situation.

The experience was almost like the blinding illumination of a vision. Just as she was about to turn to her former friend with an outrush of sympathy, it was as though a picture had been thrown upon a screen, right before her mind's eye. She saw a haggard, broken-hearted woman, no longer young; a woman who had been deceived — who had given all and received a stone in return. She saw this wife; her quivering mouth, her anguished eyelids red with long weeping, as she sat, strung up to endure a publicity she loathed, cruelly contrasted in the public eye with the youthful, attractive Miss Lisle. Gaenor had come into court, her heart so full of resentment and bitterness against Craven's wife, that she had felt as if the heat of her hatred must scorch the woman who was trying to ruin her. Before the end of the trial she had pitied Lady Barbara.

Her revulsion of feeling was complete.

"You forget," she said chokingly, "there is another person to be considered in this matter. Lady Barbara. . . . She has her faults, but there is no question as to her attachment to her husband. He did her one cruel wrong. He married her because he wanted her money. Now she falsely supposes that he

has done her a worse wrong. Do you ask me to let her go on in this belief, when her poor desolate heart is breaking? Do you remember her, at the trial? Her very words are in my ears: 'It is for his own sake, and the girl's sake — I wish to set him free. I love him, better than I love my own happiness. . . .' Do you ask me to help in keeping us this deception which had brought her to such sorrow? Oh, you ask too much!"

Constance started to her feet. Evidently she was unprepared for this view of the matter. Her laying bare her own heart had been a tremendous effort; no doubt she had thought such an appeal could not fail of its object. To her amazement, here was Gaenor looking at the question from the other woman's point of view — criticizing, judging her.

"Colonel Craven and you," said the girl clearly, "had your chance when you were young. You lost it, through your own cowardice and selfishness. You wanted to be rich — both of you! Now, having eaten your cake, you still want to have it, at the expense of whatever may stand in your way — the honour of one woman, the happiness of two women and one man. Don't you see that there would be a curse upon your marriage? How could you accept your desire at such a price?"

Mrs. Lyons had heard her out: but as she listened her face had slowly hardened back into its accustomed ruthlessness. "How dare you — how dare you speak to me with this insolence!" she retorted. "You think that you are on the winning side, it appears, and that

I must bear the abuse and insult which, like all upstarts, you are so ready to hurl. I suppose you think that I have put myself in your power by my confidence, which I have just given you? You are mistaken. I told you my love-story, because I always wish first to appeal to the good feeling of my hearer. I find that it is of no use to make any appeal to yours. Very well, then. It only remains to show you that you are mistaken. All that I have said has been said without a witness. If your husband means to go on with his interference in my affairs, there is but one thing left for me to do. Charlie must own that you were in the Pavilion all night with him, as everybody believes to have been the case. He will do so, at my request, if that is the only way out." She waited a moment, but Gaenor did not move.

"He has been telling me of your meeting in Paris," she went on deliberately, "and your journey to Southampton together. That will give his story the very air of truth that is required. No jury could ask for more."

The Lamia-woman stood unmasked. One almost heard the serpent hiss.

Gaenor let loose a long sigh as she looked at her. "You mean that?"

"Most certainly, Oh, virtuous Mrs. Garstin."

"Then you are a woman who deserves neither mercy nor pity," said Gaenor steadily. "This has been your doing, all along. You came to Liss Court to tempt Colonel Craven — you made his already unhappy marriage unbearable. You allowed me to suffer in your place, and now you are ready to swear falsely to cover

what you have done. . . . You are selfish, cowardly, cruel and base! . . . You are the kind of woman *that the Divorce Court seems to me to create.*"

While the air still tingled, the door opened, and Peter Garstin walked in.

He made his entrance, shoulders square and head erect. His eyes seemed full of laughter, and the curve of his lips was delightful to behold. He looked like a conqueror, fresh from victory.

At the sight of Gaenor's visitor he halted.

Mrs. Lyons rose with a self-possession which Gaenor could not but admire. She faced Peter with a smile. For just a moment it seemed that she would speak, but she changed her mind. Bowing silently, first to his wife, then to himself, she took up her muff and walked out of the room; making her exit with some dignity.

CHAPTER XXV

PETER'S WIFE

"For the wind is their doom and their blessing:
To desire, and have always above
A possession beyond their possessing,
A love beyond reach of their love."

SWINBURNE.

PETER's eyes shot a message to his wife. "Shall I let her go?"

She assented mutely. He opened the door, and closed it after the velvet train.

They two were shut in — left there together, in a silence full of tumult.

He stood against the door, and only the width of the room was between them. Gaenor's pulses seemed to fail, and her eyes grew misty. Was he there, at last, in the centre of the labyrinth? Could such joy be coming to her, the culprit, who had crept so long, bowed under her heavy burden of shame and calumny? . . . She could not believe it; she dare not look up. . . .

It seemed as if he awaited a signal. Must she give it? Were his eager eyes compelling the response of hers?

Beat, beat, went the pulses in her brain — her heart was swelling, till it touched her throat; — she had, at whatever cost, to lift her eyes all those miles from the carpet, to send a glance across the ocean that rolled be-

tween her and the door; at last it came — the silent summons. He caught it, and with a swift movement recklessly crossed the intervening leagues and stood before her with eager hands outstretched.

—“My wife! Forgive me.”

Men will not understand that there are moments when, to a maiden, her very face is a naked thing and needs covering. How could a mere girl encounter the rapture, let alone the pleading of those unsheathed eyes?

“Peter,” her voice was almost a whisper. She caught at his hands as if she were slipping — “Peter — *do you know?* ”

“All that matters,” he faltered, and suddenly it was he, not she, who had broken down. His head was on her shoulder, his masterful eyes hidden. “Oh, Gae-nor,” he gasped, “for God’s sake say you love me, or I think I shall go out of my mind!”

“But I do love you — already,” — was the murmured answer, and she could add, for her face was in shelter — “that has been the trouble all along! I loved you, and oh! what should I have done, if I had not been able to make you understand?”

He attempted no reply — in words — just then, but his clasp grew closer and closer.

“Peter,” she said after a while, “tell me what you have found out.”

“In a minute. I must know more important things first. If you loved me, why did you hold me off?”

“Why, of course, because I would take nothing under

false pretences. How could I kiss you with — *all that* — between? ”

“ If you had,”—he was holding her head in the crook of his arm so as to look down into her eyes — “ if you had — I believe I should not have cared a hang for — *all that*.”

“ Which would have been wrong,” said Gaenor quickly.

“ Would it? I’ve forgotten about right and wrong; you’ll have to teach me all over again.”

“ I shall have to wait for a lucid interval before I begin my instructions.”

“ If you smile like that, I *must* kiss you again, though you have forbidden it —”

“ If you hold me like this I can’t help smiling — let me go and I will escape out of reach.”

“ No fear! ”

“ Peter, be good! ”

“ Certainly. There’s a chance, at last, for me to be good! I have what I want! ”

“ That usually makes people worse.”

“ Not when what they want is a good thing! ”

“ Are you sure it is? Oh, Peter, tell me what you know! Let us sit down and be sensible. I’ll sit *quite* near you, and you shall hold my hand — I promise! ”

“ Don’t be in such a tremendous hurry. Before we begin to talk business, tell me one or two things. What did you think of me when you first saw me? ”

“ I thought you were very superior. What did *you* think of *me*? ”

“ I thought you were very sad.”

"And afterwards that I was very wicked."

"Nothing of the sort. Only I felt sure you were in love with Craven. Gae, do say that you see I could hardly escape the conclusion I came to — that you had gone to him?"

"Of course — I see that plainly. Circumstances built a cage of lies. Anyone would have been caught in it."

"Anyone as jealous as I was! I tell you, jealousy does let you see the stuff you are made of. It does display the primeval man, with a vengeance. Oh, Gae, Gae! . . . You don't mind a quite gentle kiss, like that — do you? . . . You will be really Gay now, won't you — I shall see that dimple every day, and the glint in your eye. . . . Good Lord, am I getting sentimental! You promised to pull me up, you know, if I ever did!"

"It would be a case of pot calling kettle black," she responded quaintly. "I feel as silly as the very silliest — we must rescue ourselves — Peter, be very good, and change the subject!"

"Well, if you'll stay just as we are, without moving, I'll tell you about Craven, poor brute."

—"Why do you say poor brute?"

"Because he is miserable. He wants to be off this marriage — he more than hinted that Mrs. Lyons put the announcement in the papers to prevent his crying off. He is ashamed of himself, sorry for his wife, wretched about you. He asks no more than to be allowed to confess and go home to Lady Barbara. He could have done both, without compromising Mrs.

Lyons in the least, if she had not sent that paragraph to the papers."

He went on to describe his interview with the Colonel. Wyman had been present throughout. The Colonel had begun by demanding a written promise of secrecy. This they had absolutely refused to give. The Colonel then said that in that case he could say nothing, as what he had to communicate implicated another person. Peter and Wyman, therefore, told him that they had set enquiries on foot, that they had discovered already that a stable-hand at Liss Court had seen the motor come in at 5:39 on the morning after the golf tournament, and that they were following up other clues. They had already taken steps to prevent the decree from being made absolute, and nothing would deter them from their course. Peter, moreover, explained that the fact of his sister being the wife of the new rector of Otterbeck made it absolutely imperative that his own wife should be publicly cleared.

From the point of view of the Colonel himself, and the lady concerned, they thought a voluntary statement of the truth would be the best.

Thus they had parted, Craven to consult the lady in question, Peter to his wife's feet to seek plenary absolution.

This, as has been seen, he not only obtained, but returned, and with the mutual confession the veil of the Inner Shrine was lifted, and the two passed in beyond, to a joy unlooked for, and a life most exquisitely new.

Step by step, as they sat together, they lived back across the days of their brief wooing.

The hours passed by like a dream.

Peter had told Wyman not to expect him to do any business until the following day.

Wyman agreed, with a smile of superior wisdom, and was, to put it mildly, not at all astonished to receive a line next morning to the effect that Mrs. Garstin found London a bit trying, so Peter and she were going to run down to Cornwall for a week, to try and find some sunshine. Would Wyman please devote his whole mind to the case meanwhile?

"*Vogue la galère*," observed the best man, grinning as he read.

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CHAPTER XXVI

"AND AFTER TIME AS WELL"

"In all contracts there is usually some risk of loss, balancing some chance of gain; but were men free to recede, when the balance turned against them, there would be an end to all contracts, all social stability. Most men and women at fifty or thereabouts, will commonly say: 'Had I foreseen at twenty all that I should have to go through, I would have chosen otherwise.' Of course they would; but had they foreseen the consequences of that other choice, or of any other, they would have chosen nothing at all. It is the very condition of life that the future is veiled from us, and that we must in youth, and often afterwards, take a leap in the dark and be prepared to accept the place in which we alight."

MAUD PETRE.

SOME days later, an official contradiction of the marriage announcement of Mrs. Lyons appeared in the papers. It was supplemented by the information that she and her brother were starting upon a twelve-months' pleasure-cruise, during which it was their intention to make the circle of the globe.

The first announcement of the marriage had caused a shock of amazement to Lady Barbara Craven, who, pending the final result of her divorce proceedings, was living in seclusion at Bournemouth.

In her own narrow, unsympathetic fashion, she was a just woman; and mixed with all her bitterness there had been a germ of pity and affection for Gaenor Lisle. To Barbara it was no strange thing that this girl, or

any girl, should love Charlie. In his wife's estimation he was eminently lovable. She had sat in the drawing-rooms of Liss Court and watched the theatricals — the performance of the piece in which the Colonel had posed as the middle-aged man of the world in love with a fresh young girl. The unloved wife had seen — as Constance, secure in her empire, had failed to see — how much sincerity was mingled with the somewhat amateurish art of her husband's performance.

In her better moments she was sorry for Gaenor.

The night in the Golf House had been, as she thought, a sudden, swift succumbing to a temptation unexpectedly presented. Her husband was not a bad man — she knew that. He must be filled with a very agony of repentance for the wrong he had done the inexperienced girl. To enable him to make what the world has agreed to look upon as a reparation, was a great part of his wife's motive in seeking divorce.

And now he was seeking to marry again, but not to marry the girl whose name had been blasted by the legal proceedings!

The limits of the wife's powers of being surprised were reached when she read that announcement.

Constance Lyons!

Why? How was it possible? What had she to do with Charlie, or he with her?

She faced, for the first time, the possibility of having made a terrible mistake. Had she been unaware of an undercurrent, running in an unforeseen direction?

Memory called up the white face and dauntless eyes

of Gaenor Lisle, uttering her oath, persisting in her denial, defiant and at bay.

That there should be another woman in the case had been the one thing which judge, jury, and counsel had supposed to be out of the question. But there might have been another woman.

Barbara had never liked Mrs. Lyons — their natures were too different, their point of view too sharply contrasted. Thinking it over, it seemed to her that Constance was a woman who might be selfish and cruel enough to sacrifice another for her own ends.

Supposing that were so — supposing they had all made a hideous, irreparable mistake — what had become of the poor little Intervener, the unjustly Notorious Miss Lisle?

She had disappeared from view — broken, spoilt, done away with.

Barbara Craven, when she reached this point in her surmises, began to feel that, if this child had been ruined and forsaken through her means, the whole of her future life must be devoted to her reinstatement.

She sent for her lawyer, and related the curious circumstance of the marriage announcement. She confided to him her suspicions. He had surprising news for her. Gaenor Lisle was married! Her husband was interposing to prevent the decree being made absolute; and the marriage arranged between Mrs. Lyons and Colonel Craven was broken off.

The tidings opened new vistas of doubt and apprehension. Gaenor married, and Constance away! If

the truth came to light, and there was no decree — then Charlie was still tied to her. She did not spare herself even the most painful thought. He, usually a kindly and benevolent man, had acquiesced in a monstrous injustice: he had kept back the facts which would have saved Gaenor, because his wife had made his prison insupportable; because when he saw a way out, he leapt for it, not caring who or what stood in his path.

Of all that she had suffered, this was the worst pang.

There seemed, however, nothing that she could do. She had to wait until the tangle was straightened out, until the whole truth should come to light.

It came. The newspapers joyfully seized upon the surprising elucidation of a mystery which had baffled surmise.

Even then, what was she to do?

It was all over, the divorce had failed, her husband was still her husband. He sent her no word, however, and she did not know where he was. She could but await some letter from his lawyer. None such arrived.

She told herself that he had seen himself within an inch of liberty; and at the last moment had been hurled back into his prison. Moreover, the world now knew that he had sacrificed an innocent girl to the exigencies of an intrigue. Socially, financially, he was done. What future remained to him? Barbara's heart bled for him; but she could do nothing but wait.

The only thing which she could feel sure about was that he must be very hard up.

Liss Court was for sale, Otterbeck was shut up. These things came to her ears. No word of her hus-

band until February, when terrible weather set in — frost, long and bitter, with cutting winds from the east.

One day a letter came to Bournemouth, from the old woman who had once been the Colonel's nurse, and who remained at Otterbeck as caretaker. She said she was writing on her own responsibility, and if the Colonel found out she had written, she dared not think what the result would be. Nevertheless, her duty demanded that she should let Lady Barbara know that he was lying very ill in his old home, nobody knowing that he was there. He had arrived in a state of destitution, one bitter cold night, with double pneumonia setting in. He had forbidden the calling in of a doctor, both on account of the expense, and because he would not have the neighbourhood know of his wretched plight. Nurse had done for him as well as she could, and the pneumonia had passed off, but his weakness was alarming. She had her doubts as to whether he would ever get up again, and thought her ladyship ought to be told before it was too late, that she might forgive as she hoped to be forgiven.

The news awoke everything that was best in Barbara. She travelled to Otterbeck the following day, bringing with her a young doctor who happened at the time to be staying in the same hotel at Bournemouth with herself.

It was generally known that she had returned to Otterbeck; but not for some time that her husband was with her.

Nothing was said between them, when they first met, respecting the situation. The man was too ill and too

weary of life — too disappointed and humiliated, to be capable of keen feeling.

The best of doctoring and nursing, his native air and his comfortable surroundings brought him a certain way towards recovery: but there he halted.

Barbara knew him well. When the doctor told her he feared his patient had something on his mind, she had no difficulty in guessing that the 'something' was financial liabilities.

She asked for a complete list of his debts, and discharged them all.

Her generosity touched the heart of one so humbled. He knew her devotion to himself — many a time he had hated her for it. Now that his own baseness had been made public, the fact that his wife knew it and yet was prepared to stand by him, moved him to a real remorse.

Barbara was in some subtle way improved since their separation. Whilst they remained together the continual friction of the state of things between them, joined to ill-health, had worn her temper and nerves. The futile yet pathetic struggle to look young had led her to dress ridiculously and use aids to beauty of more than doubtful value.

Now that she had left off dyeing her hair, the silvery aureole set off her decided cast of features, and softened them. Her expression was no longer that of a querulous invalid, but of a woman who has suffered and has forgiven.

Taught by her bitter experience, she carefully refrained, with her husband, from anything like the

process known as rubbing it in. She did not allow the unhappy man to think that she looked down upon him. There was no rancour in her manner — none of the triumph in his fall which he had dreaded.

There came a day when they spoke out, each to each. He abased himself as unreservedly as any woman could desire: more, in fact, than Barbara could stand. She made full response. She had been intolerant, exacting, peevish, and above all she had tried to make him feel that she held the purse-strings; and that on that account, if on no other, he must be civil. This she meant to change. She was going to give him a fixed income. He should be his own master, and come and go as he pleased. She realized that their marriage could never be ideal — each had been disappointed: but by God's help, she was willing, if he was, to try and make the best of it.

“I've made a poor thing of my life,” he owned. “It was that child, Gaenor, who first made me see it. If I had had a man's courage, I should not, when we were young, have let them part Con and me. I should have married her and worked for her. But I don't think Con would have seen herself in the part, somehow. I started playing with the child, I own it, with the notion of covering my visits to Liss Court. It was not long before I found out that the little Lisle girl was worth ten thousand of poor Con, with all her beauty. If anybody had asked me beforehand, I would have said that I'd cut off my right hand sooner than injure little Gae. And you see what I did, as a matter of fact. Well! That's the kind of chap you've got, to pass the re-

mainder of your life with. If you can put up with it, I think I ought to be able."

"I will do what I can to help," she said falteringly. "I will leave off crying for the moon, and try to make do on what you can give me, Charlie. And, if ever we can do anything to show Gaenor Lisle how sorry we are —"

"I don't fancy Gae will want it. She has married no end of a nice chap, and they are going to be very happy. He did the right thing; took his trouble by the horns and overcame it. He fought for his happiness and won it. Some day, I hope they will be friends with us, Barbara."

"I hope so," she answered with sincerity.

Peter and Gaenor spent the first year of their married life at Porz Gwenn.

They bought a little house there, to be a holiday refuge in the future; a house perched upon the hill that overlooks the rock-bound coast, the peaceful, isle-girdled harbour, and the Seven Islands of the Blest that lie, as it were, just out of reach: the jewels of the horizon's ring.

In those sacred months they lived again the days of their first meeting, never losing the sense of amazement, the conviction of having been led towards each other by a Power stronger than that of conscious reason.

"It makes one sure that all the old legends are true," said Gaenor one day the following spring, when they sat together upon the Ile de l'Abbaye. "Just as the maiden is condemned, and bound, and the torch is being carried to the faggots, the champion appears from

nowhere. She has but to trust him, he has but to believe in her — and behold! She is utterly rescued.”

“Which is to say that nothing great can be accomplished in this world without the adventure of faith,” replied her husband. “The very moment that I saw your innocence clearly, I also saw the way to save you.”

“But you believed in me because you loved me — love comes first.”

“I think not. I loved you because I believed in you. Love comes last, which is the most important.”

“First, last, and all the time,” whispered Gaenor.

“And after time as well,” said Peter gravely, looking across the grassy graves of the unnamed mariners, out to the immeasurable distances of the faint blue sea.

THE END

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